MYSTIC APPROACH
to
The Veda and the Upanishad

M. P. PANDIT

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The Veda and the Upanishads

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PREFACE

THE tradition that the knowledge of the Veda is threefold or even can be manifold is as old as the Vedas. Yet, despite the diverse interpretations to which these litanies lend themselves, it is on their spiritual content that their celebrated title to be the Scripture of Wisdom rests. The Vedas have been held aloft in the ages-old national tradition as the Book of Knowledge——Knowledge of God, World and Soul. The present studies aim at getting at this core, without prejudice to other possible lines of approach. The method adopted is Sri Aurobindo's Esoteric Interpretation of the Veda.

Though these papers were contributed (to the Annual Numbers of Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay and Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Calcutta) on special occasions at the Ashram, they are governed by a unity of purpose which is to test and see for ourselves how far the claim made for the Vedas as Revealed Scriptures is justified and also to appraise the soundness of the mode of Symbolic Interpretation. In the first paper a rapid account of the current views on the Vedas is followed by the main principles of the mystic interpretation of Sri Aurobindo. The application of this

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method and the results it yields are illustrated in the subsequent chapters on the Soma and on the Legend of Shunahshepa (with adequate internal evidence from the Brahmanas in support).

It is generally held that the Upanishads are a reaction and revolt against the primitive hedonism of the Vedic poets and constitute the beginnings of a departure into an intellectual and metaphysical mould on the part of the Indian mind. That this view is wrong, baseless and conjectural is shown in the last paper while at the same time expounding the true character of the Upanishads which draw upon and continue the spiritual tradition of the Vedas. It draws attention to the real nature of these texts which is not of a philosophical or doctrinaire kind—that belongs to a later age of the Sastras—but essentially of living guidebooks to the seekers of Truth.

A word as to how these studies came to be carried on is necessary. In truth, these are a by-product, through my mind and pen, of the force at work in the person of Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry for the reclamation of the treasures of ancient heritage in the Vedas and the Upanishads. It was when he was engaged in writing the *Siddhāñjana*, his Commentary on the First Ashtaka of the Rig Veda, that I got the opportunity to breathe something of the air of the Vedic spirit. His remarks, observations and writings on the Upanishads and the Tantra carried me to the threshold of these adjoining expanses as well. Orally and otherwise he guided me to develop this interest and led it to find active expression in the form it has now taken.

Unless otherwise mentioned, all the English renderings of Vedic Riks in the following pages are from Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry's translations.

M. P. Pandit

I

VEDIC STUDY: NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

MAX MULLER records an interesting incident. Freidrich Rosen was a noted German scholar, one of the pioneers of western students who turned to Vedic studies in the early years of the last century. It appears one day when he was busy in the British Museum copying out the hymns of the Rig Veda, Raja Rammohan Roy—the leading light of the Indian Renaissance—came in and was surprised, disagreeably, at the work Rosen was engaged in. He admonished the scholar not to waste any time on the Vedas and advised him to take to the Upanishads instead. We do not know if Rosen swallowed the advice at all. Obviously not. For he was still engaged in the Veda at the time of his death and his edition of the First Book of the Rig Veda with Latin translation did appear later. The incident is noteworthy for the light it sheds on the mental attitude of the cultured and educated Indians of the time towards the Veda. The outlook of the educated section of our countrymen as regards the Vedic hymns has undergone little change even after more than a century today. And this is no wonder. For they have but dutifully followed all along in the footsteps of the European professors who have, as a class, studied and regarded the Vedas more as specimens of antiquarian and philological interest than as records of any sustaining value. To them the Vedas are study-worthy not for anything intrinsically significant but for the side-lights they throw on the social and other conditions of their times. By themselves the Vedic hymns are 'singularly deficient in simplicity, natural pathos or sublimity', they have 'no sublime poetry as in Isiah or Job or the Psalms of David'. They are primitive chants where 'cows and bullocks are praised in most extravagant expressions' as among the 'Dinkas and Kaffirs in Africa whose present form of economics must be fairly in agreement with that of the Vedic Aryan'. Even such a famous scholar as Oldenburg must needs note that here is 'the grossly flattering garrulousness of an imagination which loves the bright and the garish', while Winterneitz records, with approval evidently, that Leopald Von Schroder finds similarity between some of these hymnal chants and 'notes written down by insane persons which have been preserved by psychiatrists'.

Not all from the West, however, have reacted in the manner noted above. Some have brought to bear a more sympathetic and closer understanding on their studies of the Veda and have confessed to a remarkable widening of the vistas of their higher mental horizons after their study of these Books. There is Brunnhofer, for instance, who is constrained to exclaim: 'The Veda is like the lark's morning trill of humanity awakening to the consciousness of its greatness.'

Indian tradition, however, has held the Vedas all along in the highest reverence, it has invested them with the authority of a revealed scripture, Books of Wisdom. Notwithstanding all the centuries-old efforts at such debunkings, the Vedas stand firm as a rock towering like the snow-capped peaks of Kailas overtopping and overlooking the vast panoramic expanse below drawing its nourishment every moment from the ceaseless streams that flow from above—the huge and hoary expanse of Indian life and culture. What is the secret that has enabled the Vedas to hold the pre-eminent position they have occupied from the beginnings of time in this country? Is there anything in them which is valuable for man as to exact respect and reverence to the extent they have done? And if the Vedas are really so valuable and so sacred, why is it that they have become the targets of so much criticism? Why is it that the Vedas are today so much enveloped in misunderstanding and condemnation that they are in danger of being completely lost to sight?

And what, in the first place, is the Veda?

The Vedas are the only extant records of the lives and expressions of our forefathers of an age upon the time-limits of which scholars and historians have been unable to agree with any degree of finality. Indian scholars like Tilak and Europeans like Jacobi are inclined to date the period from Four to Six Millenniums before the Christian era while other western scholars have a strong tendency to advance the date to as near the Christian era as possible. Be that as it may, it is the songs and chants of these fathers of the race—*pūrve pitaraḥ*—, it is their hymns that form the starting-point and the kernel for the vast literature that has flowed from and developed round them and goes by the name VEDA. At some period of their history, very likely at the close of the epoch during which the hymns were first sung and celebrated, it was found necessary to collect and compile all the available hymns current at that time. The necessity for the compilation may have arisen in order to prevent their loss inevitable with the passage of time and also to preserve them in the form in which they were chanted. Tradition has it that they were compiled under the direction of that Master compiler of the Great Age—Vyasa. Certainly what have been compiled do not exhaust all the hymns that must have been current; the compilations represent the remnants that had survived the ravages of time and were still extant at the time of the compilation. These hymnal texts had been handed down from mouth to mouth and it was inevitable that they must have suffered diminution in quantity with each generation.

The hymns were collected and arranged in four different compilations, *Samhitas*, each collection being governed by different considerations about the nature of the hymns, the purpose for which they were compiled, etc. Thus hymns which were largely in the nature of prayers and dedications to Gods were collected—says the tradition—by Paila under the guidance of Vyasa, and went to form the Rik Samhita. Hymns which were particularly chanted during religious and social functions of the community were compiled by Vaishampayana under the title Yajus Samhita. Jaimini is said to have collected hymns that were set to music and melody—Saman. There is also the fourth collection of hymns and chants ascribed to Sumantu, known as Atharva Samhita. We need not dwell upon the subject of the Atharva Samhita and the controversy around it but recognise the Vedic tradition as has come down to us which includes all the four Samhitas in its field. Each of these Samhitas was followed gradually by explanations and dissertations in prose and in verse for elucidating the meanings, allusions, legends, etc. of the hymns and their application. These portions are known as Brahmanas. The concluding portions of these or the portions attached to them are discussions and speculations of a philosophical and spiritual import based certainly on the ideas and texts found in the Hymns. They are called the Aranyakas and Upanishads. Each Veda thus comprises the Mantra Samhita, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.'[1]

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[1] The Rig Veda is said to have had 21 recensions. The recension that has come down to us and in use now is ascribed to Vedamitra or Shakalya. The Rig Veda Samhita as it stands consists of 1,017 Suktas (Hymns) or 1,028 if the 11 Valakhilya Suktas which are supplementary, included in the VIII Book, are added to them. Each hymn is of varying number of Riks and the total number of Riks varies from 10,402 to 10,622. The Samhita is sub-divided in two ways. One, for purposes of memorising and study, *adhyayana,* into eight equal portions, *aṣtakas,* each one of which contains eight chapters, *adhyāyas.* The *adhyāyas,* are further divided into groups, *vargas,* which consist of an average of five *ṛks.* The other division, suited for application, *anuṣthāna,* is into *mandalas,* Books, ten in

Now the hymns collected in the Samhitas are largely prayers, invocations to the deities. Each hymn consists of a number of Mantras which according to tradition are not compositions but the *seeings*, the revelations made

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number, each Mandala into so many *anuvākas* and each *anuvāka* into hymns, *suktas*, the Suktas containing varying number of *ṛks*. The Hymns have been arranged in each Mandala either according to the Rishi or Rishis to whom they are ascribed or according to the deity or deities to whom the hymns are dedicated. Thus the Second Mandala contains the hymns of Gritsamada and his descendants, the III of Vishwamitra and his family, IV mostly of Vamadeva (40 out of 58 hymns), V of the house of Atri, VI mostly of Bharadwaja, VII of Vasishtha and family, VIII of Kanva and Angiras. The IX Mandala consists of hymns dedicated wholly to Soma (excepting the *Apri* hymn and one in which Soma is invoked jointly with Agni, and another with Agni and other gods.) The first Mandala contains Riks by a number of Rishis—*śatarchins*—authors each of a hundred or an indefinite number of Riks, invoking many different deities; so also the last, the tenth Mandala.

Forming part of the Rig Veda is the Aitareya Brahmana and the Aitareya Aranyaka and the Aitareya Upanishad. The Kaushitaki or Sankhayana Brahmana and the Aranyaka and Upanishad after the same name also belong to the Rig Veda.

The Yajurveda Samhita consists of prayers mostly taken from the Rik Samhita and formulae which the Adhwaryu priests have to utter while performing their duties at the sacrificial ceremonies. There are two Yajurveda Samhitas—(1) the Taittiriya Samhita or the Krishna Yajurveda Samhita and (2) the Vajasaneyi or the Shukla Yajurveda Samhita. The former includes the Brahmana in the body of the Samhita while the latter includes an Upanishad instead. For an illuminating account of the origin of the Vajasaneyi Samhita and the implications thereof *vide Lights on the Veda* (pp. 40-41) by Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry. These Samhitas are partly in verse and partly in prose. The verse portions are mostly selections of Riks, chosen for particular applications in the sacrifices.

to the particular Rishis who were the *seers*, *mantra-draṣṭāraḥ*, in whose names they have come down to us. These prayers and invocations were used during religious and other ceremonies like the Yajna, Sacrifice.

The Krishna Yajurveda contains the Taittiriya Brahmana which is really a continuation of the Taittiriya Samhita. The Taittiriya Aranyaka and Taittiriya Upanishad and also Mahanarayana Upanishad belong to this Veda. The Kathaka, Svetasvetara and Maitrayaniya Upanishads are also of this collection. The Shukla Yajurveda contains the famous and most important Shatapatha Brahmana, its Aranyaka and the Brihadaranyaka and Isha Upanishads.

The Samaveda is almost wholly a collection of Riks from the Rig Veda Samhita set to melody—generally to Gayatri metre—to be sung by the *Udgātṛ* priests. Of the 1500 and odd verses all except some 70 are from the Rig Veda. The collection is divided into two parts, *ārcika* and the *uttarārcika*. The Samaveda contains the Tandya Mahabrahmana, also called Pancha Vimsa—one of the oldest Brahmanas containing rites and references of special interest, notably the *Vrātyastoma*, a ceremony to admit non-aryans in the Aryan fold. The Shadvimsa Brahmana, the last portion of which is called the Adbhuta Brahmana, is really a continuation after the Pancha-Vimsa; Jaiminiya Brahmana is also said to be part of the collection in Sama Veda but is not fully available. The Chhandogya Upanishad of which the first section is an Aranyaka belongs to a Samaveda Brahmana probably the Tandya Brahmana. The Kena also belongs to this collection.

The Atharva Samhita containing 731 (760 according to some) hymns —about six thousand verses—is available in the Shaunaka recension which is the best preserved. Nearly a seventh of the verses are from the Rig Veda. A variety of subjects including medicine, charms, love, death, etc. are treated therein. The Gopatha Brahmana is attached to it. The Mundaka, Prasna, and Mandukya Upanishads are parts of this Veda.

Besides, there is also a class of literature known as Vedangas. But they do not form part of the Veda, though they bear upon the study of it. They are really enlargements and developments of the disserta-

The authors of the Brahmanas while explaining and elucidating the meaning and significances of these hymns tended to emphasise the application side of it and dealt at length with the details, the minutiae of the ceremonies in which the hymns were supposed to be made use of. The human mind has an obstinate preference for form, the concrete as opposed to the abstract and no wonder the tendency grew of attaching premier importance to the ritual of the ceremonies and only a subsidiary role to the mantras and naturally the Brahmanas became the scripture of the external religions. This tendency found expression and a lead in later times in the school of *Mimamsakas* or Vedists whose position was given a respectable footing and influential standing by successive champions the first of whom was Jaimini who gave an ethical and religious framework for this method of approach to the Vedas. Not all subscribed to this way of looking at the Veda Samhita. There were those who leaned more towards the thought-substance rather than

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tions and hints found in the Brahmanas regarding the mantras, Yajna, and allied topics. A study of them was held to be indispensable for a proper understanding of the Vedas and hence they were attached to the Veda, *vedāṅga*, limbs of the Veda. They are treatises on phonetics *śikṣa*, and metrics *chandas*, both of which were necessary for reciting of the Vedas, on grammar *vyākaraṇa* and etymology *nirukta*, necessary for understanding them and on sacrifices (rituals) *kalpa* and astronomy *jyotisha*, both of these being necessary for the ceremonial use of the Vedas. These contain doctrines adumbrated in the Brahmanas and have been put in concise formulas called *sutras*, aphorisms for convenience of memory.

to the ceremonial utility of these hymnal texts and developed and cultivated a thought-life and a soul-life on the lines discernible in the hymns. The beginnings of these knowledge-seekers are to be found in the Aranyakas and the Upanishads which later became the scripture of the *Uttara Mimamsa* or Vedanta of which Badarayana was the champion. The Vedantins always looked to these texts and not to the Brahmanas for enlightenment. This dual tendency among the adherents of the Veda found a sharp expression, in course of time, in the bifurcation of the Veda into Karma Kanda and Jnana Kanda. The Brahmana texts formed the authorities of the former and the Upanishads of the latter. The hymns themselves were relegated to the background to be summoned only for support and sanction to the findings of the respective schools. This was the position as far as we can gather, at the end of the Vedic period. After that we meet with a big blank in this aspect of the nation's history. Doubtless the Vedas continued to exercise thoughtful minds, the Vedic hymns must have become objects of attention of serious students, particularly in that age of intellectual efflorescence which followed close on the heels of the Upanishadic period, and many schools of Vedic studies must have sprung up. Yaska the great etymologist indeed refers to some of them. But to that we will come later. Suffice it to say that there were a number of ways of approach to the Veda current during those times, each differing with the motive of approach. Etymologists, historians, ritualists, priests, seekers of

Truth, all these had their own ways of understanding the hymns. But there was not one tradition as such that stood out over the rest as the one true and authoritative interpretation of the Veda. Attempts were made now and then by able exponents of the different schools of thought to establish their own line of interpretation but none seems to have acquired any commanding position as the most widely accepted and thereby the authoritative. It was so, at least till the fourteenth century A.D., when Sayana appeared on the scene.

II

It has always been a debatable question among philosophers of history whether it is the men that mould and shape events and epochs or whether men are not just material-ends through which historical forces precipitate themselves into action. While it is difficult to find a verdict exclusively either way, because truth seems to lie in both the view-points, instances are not rare when powerful individuals by sheer force of their personality and mastery of will and mind have succeeded in directing the course of history in the direction of their choice. Such a remarkable personage was Sayanacharya. Living in the 14th century A.D. he came to be known as Madhava Vidyaranya, founder of the Vijayanagar Empire—that glorious isle of culture and progress in the surrounding mass of the then ruling cult of Islamic sword and fire. Whether he was the same or his brother as sustained by some, he was in any case a man of uncommon solidity of learning and capacity for industry. He addressed himself to a task which none had so successfully attempted before. He set out to comment upon, explain and fix the meaning of the entire collection of the four Samhitas along with their Brahmanas. He lived at a time when the outer form and ritual of religion had attained an increasing supremacy over the spirit within and naturally he shared the beliefs of his age. He accepted the ritualist doctrines that the Brahmanas constituted the real Veda which was traditionally looked upon as having proceeded from beyond the beginnings of time and beyond the origins of human mind. The Mantras were important in so far as they subserved and allowed themselves to be made use of for support of this position. Sayana set upon his task with this avowed intention, namely, to fix firmly the claim of the ritualist to be the sole-sufficing guardian and exponent of the Veda. He utilised all the resources available to him, applied all the thoroughness he was capable of, commented upon every word of the text with meticulous care though with a pronounced ritualist slant and succeeded in producing a work which once for all oriented the message of the scriptures in the line of the phase of Vedic worship he represented. He heavily robed the Vedas in the folds of the ritualist raiments. Regarding the achievements and the far-reaching consequences of this remarkable work of Sayana, we need make no apology to quote from the following striking appraisal of the same:

"He (Sayana) left to posterity a finished and complete commentary on all the Brahmanas and the Mantra Samhitas of which the Rik-Samhita presents insuperable difficulties for interpretation. But he overcomes them, gives generally a lucid exposition of the hymns assigning their place in the ceremonial worship and presents a harmonious whole of the plan of his work. The merits of this stupendous work of Sayana are many and so precious that his work is an indispensable help to Vedic students....In a sense Sayana went far beyond the Brahmanas themselves; for it is doubtful if the latter were sure that they have correctly interpreted the Riks even for purposes of rituals, and what is more, they have not taken up the whole body of the hymnal text for explanation and use in the sacrificial rites......Sayana's commentary on the Riks succeeds in establishing Ritualism as the sole and central creed of the Veda, founded on the eternal self-existent words and passages of the Brahmanas to which the mantras are the uncreated self-existent accessories....The work is indispensable for the student of the Veda for the invaluable help it gives, the numerous references, mention of ancient authorities, traditions, lexicons, legends, alternative meanings suggesting possible senses of words, verses and hymns, elucidation of accents and points of grammar and construction of sentences in these ancient litanies of a remote antiquity. There are other commentaries on the Riks, but in fragments and are of little avail and importance before the weight and prestige of Sayana and the volume of his work.

"Nevertheless the central defect of Sayana's work remains. It is the defect of a representative obscurantism of the time, unprogressive and narrow, vast erudition developing an extraordinary poverty of sense attached to the hymns of the Vedic seers, enthroning in the heart of the Vedic religion the external cult and worship of Nature Powers and performance of ceremonial rites for material benefits and other-wordly pleasures, a sublimated hedonistic doctrine before which the ideals of an inner and higher life and spiritual knowledge have their facets disfigured or eclipsed and hidden in disgrace."[1]

This, then, was the decisive turn given to the course of the Vedic stream, setting it run through successive ages along the waste-lands of the increasingly mysterious rituals and mystifying priestcraft until the waters thinned out into sparse rivulets and almost disappeared amidst the arid sands of Hinduism in its decline and all-round bankruptcy by the end of the eighteenth century.

It was about this time that scholars from Europe turned their attention towards the Vedas. They desired to make acquaintance with works which the Indians held, though only in memory, as revealed scriptures of a dateless antiquity, partly in order to probe into the conditions of life and mental development of a people whose descendants had been lately delivered into their (Europeans') care by a wise Providence and partly to see what support they could get from these ancient records for the new theories and sciences that were being just developed on the Continent of Europe. It was not easy for foreigners to get at these manuscripts which had for long become the exclusive monopoly of Brahmins. However with the patronage and material help of the East India Company they managed to get and study the texts with the aid of indigenous scholarship. They equipped themselves with sufficient knowledge of classical Sanskrit. But the Vedic language presented considerable difficulties and Sayana with his word-for-word renderings and explanations of legends and ceremonies which were utterly alien to their culture and upbringing, proved to be a great boon to them. They made Sayana the base of their labours and applied to their studies their knowledge of the new sciences, Comparative Mythology, Comparative Religion, Philology. That these sciences were quite often largely conjectural is another matter. They sought to trace parallels between the early Chaldean, Roman, Greek and other Mediterranean peoples and the Vedic society; Sayana's investiture of the Vedic hymns with a wholly ritualistic meaning, his explanations of the prayers and entreaties of the early Aryans to their Gods for wealth, cattle, women, protection from and destruction of the malevolent, supplications for waters—all these fitted in perfectly with their ideas of what these primitives should have been in that early, pastoral stage of development. But they did not stop with Sayana and his ritualism nor did they accept *in toto* what he said. For in many places when Sayana comes across passages which are openly spiritual in import he does not hesitate to say so. Again in some portions he speaks of God and gods as if they were really supernatural living personalities. In such places the scholars dismissed him as unduly superstitious, for such primitive people as the emigrant Aryans could not be expected to be conversant with ideas and conceptions which come in only at a later stage of human development. It would be unnatural—an impossible exception to the general trend of human progress throughout! The Gods that were worshipped by the Vedic people were simply personified Nature-powers. Agni was the physical fire element, Indra the rain-god and Maruts the storms. Thus they were a myriad number of gods and there was polytheism. The whole of Nature was at times sung as if she was one deity—there was surely pantheism among them. To propitiate particular gods, each god, when he was being addressed, was invoked as if he was the only and sole God combining all the rest within himself. To classify this novel mode of worship a fresh term was put into currency—Henotheism, and so on. Parallels were traced between Vedic Indra and the Teutonic Thuman with his Mjolin, the Vedic 'goblin worship' and the counterpart in Turanian Chaldea. These hymns were not unlike the songs and chants of early people anywhere else in the world, when feeling helpless before mighty and powerful forces of Nature men seek to propitiate their anger and solicit their favour. Thus the modern scholars went one better than Sayana in exploding the myth of the spiritual character of the Vedic Hymns.

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[1] *Lights on the Upanishads* (pp. 117-120) by Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry.

We cannot however fail to mention that among these scholars there have been some who were deeply struck by something remarkably non-mundane in these litanies and have wondered whether after all there may not be something true in the claim made for the Veda by the country's tradition. But they have been rather exceptions than the general rule and have not influenced the general trend of modern opinion and verdict. We must not also fail to record that the western scholars have brought to bear on their studies a most painstaking industry, and the splendid editions of the Vedas and Brahmanas brought out by pioneers like Max Muller are a standing monument to the almost German thoroughness with which they applied themselves to the task. Of course industry and judgment are not synonymous nor are they always coextensive.

Max Muller observes somewhere that the authors of the Brahmanas were blinded by theology, authors of later Niruktas (etymological texts) were deceived by etymological fictions, and both conspired to mislead later authors like Sayana. Here we may add that it was Sayana who misled the later western scholars more effectively and more truly than he himself was. For truth to speak, Sayana was not a dupe. He was aware of other lines of interpretation, he refers to them and makes use of them wherever they support his avowed stand and where they conflict with him, he indifferently passes them over. He set out, as we noted, with the proclaimed intention of setting the wheels of Vedas on the rails of ritualism. He made no ceremony of delving into the Vedas for treasures of Knowledge and emerging with hands full of Ritualistic shells and Naturalistic lobsters.

III

What looked a certain death, however, proved to be just a slumber. Indian culture, Indian civilisation knows no death because it is based on the eternal verity of the Spirit—the *sanātana dharma*. Soon a many-sided powerful revivalist movement was afoot. By the middle of the last century the call to re-establish the Vedas in their sovereign pedestal for presiding over an assured and inevitable resurgence of the national life, found a vigorous expression in that stalwart champion of ancient culture, Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He called for a bold dispersal of the fog of half-baked theories and alien prejudice that had settled round the luminous Vedas and enjoined upon every son of the soil to look straight into the face of the Truth and recognise there what was indeed a Revealed Scripture. He pointed out with unanswerable proof how the concept of One Deity stood out toweringly in the Hymns with all other gods as names for its many qualities and powers. He summoned the services of the old Nairuktas and commented upon the Riks basing his interpretation on the etymological significance of the words therein and asked the world to see if there was or there was not in these Hymns a code of conduct for man, a divine law and a law of the universe. The ice was broken and the way was once more cleared for a truer appreciation of the significance of the Vedas.

Serious students have since sought to interpret the Vedas with zeal and labour but we are afraid they have failed to keep up the initial promise. Lokamanya Tilak carried on extensive researches and announced his Arctic Theory of the Veda. With the help of clues, astronomical and others, found in the many hymns, he has traced the original home of the Vedic Aryans to the Northern Polar regions. He has also calculated on the same basis the approximate date of the hymns to be six thousand years before the Christian era. As feats of subtle reasonings and mathematical calculations these discoveries are certainly admirable but they leave the main question unanswered.

Mr. Paramasiva Iyer propounded, in the early years of the century, his Geological Theory. He has sought to prove that Vritra-Ahi of the Rig Veda is really the Glacier which is the deadliest enemy of human life and property in that glacial age in which the Aryans lived and Indra is a mighty volcano with Agni for the fire. It is the fight between Lava and Glacier that is recorded in the Riks. This, he says, is the central fact of the Riks: "The surface of the earth, the seat of life, was concealed from her vivifying lord, the Sun, and weighed down by serpents[1] and in response to her pressure her father Vishwakarman raised up mighty volcanoes which fought the glaciers, lifted up the earth, loosened the rivers, cut out new beds for them high above the old rivers overwhelmed by the glaciers, fertilised her and restored her to the embraces of her distant husband."

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[1] Mr. Iyer has drawn parallels between the Vritra-Ahi and the Azi of Zenda Avesta, the Python of the Greeks, the Serpent invading the Paradise of the Hebrews, and the Dragon of the climbers of Alps

He has traced an 'amazing identity of Vedic and Puranic stories in the geological and chemical phenomenon' and proved that Gayatri=Ch_2, the Rik=bubble of hydro-carbon gas, and the like.

Then there is the Biological Theory of Mr. V.G. Rele. Mr. Rele maintains that the biological interpretation provides the true key for understanding the Veda. These texts really give the physiology of the nervous system written by the Vedic seers in symbolic language. The Vedic deities represent different centres of activity in brain, spinal cord and other parts of the nervous system of the human body. The Riks exhibit an extraordinary knowledge of the inner organism of the body on the part of the Rishis. Naturally they must have got the knowledge by dissecting the dead bodies. "This had to be done mostly secretly in those days owing to the fear of being killed as cannibals or man-hunters; and, for the same reason, the source of this knowledge could not also be revealed. It was therefore given out that this knowledge was acquired by divine inspiration; the

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and identified Vritra-Ahi, the serpent, with the Glacier as they correspond with each other in changing form, creeping movement, etc. *Vide* his book, *The Riks*.

Vedic seers heard it from Brahman. Hence it was called Sruti."[1]

We will not say these theories are all woolly conjectures. Perhaps they could be sustained, at any rate in parts. We had an old school-teacher who used to say that the Rig Veda is nothing but Ayurveda. Possibly, he would have proved his case, had we the temerity to ask for it, with the help of a few Riks here and few more there. But these theories do not touch the main question at all. Is there any basis for the millenniums-old tradition that the Veda is a 'Scripture of divine knowledge, divine worship, divine action'? Do the hymns contain anything in themselves to substantiate this faith voiced by countless saints and sacred books of the past? We have to make our choice one way or the other. Or, in the words of Sri Aurobindo: "We can no longer enshrine the Veda wrapped in the folds of an ignorant reverence or guarded by a pious self-deceit. Either the Veda is what Sayana says it is, then we have to leave it behind for ever as the document of a mythology and ritual which have no longer any living truth or force for thinking minds, or it is what the European scholars say it is, and then we have to put it away among the relics of the past as an antique record of semi-barbarous worship or else it is indeed Veda, a book of divine knowledge, and it becomes of supreme importance to know and to hear its message."

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[1] Vide *The Vedic Gods as Figures of Biology.*

IV

And Sri Aurobindo says the Vedas are truly epitomes of Knowledge, gained and bequeathed by the Rishis of old who were not bards or poets of common clay but inspired singers who poured out in living vocables the highest experiences and realisations of the soul. They were *seers*, leaders of men who had attained a high water-mark of a particular culture and civilisation and these hymnal records are just the finger-prints and signposts of their spiritual and religious endeavour. The Mantras of the Veda are not of the usual human origin, their contents bespeak the presence of the Word beyond words. Their language is antique, but behind that antiquity lies the story of human language. The axis round which the entire litany revolves is the Institution of Sacrifice, Yajna, which is the highest secret of all creation, the World-Existence that had its origin in the holocaust by which the supreme Purusha offered his own Substance for its birth even as it is destined to find its deliverance and fulfilment in its own self-giving to the Creator. The Gods to whom the hymns are addressed are the powers and personalities of the Highest Godhead, enlivening with their presence and aid the Sacrifice at which they are the honoured guests, maintaining the activities of the world or worlds over which they preside. The Vedas record the workings and manifestations of this Higher Knowledge; there may be much else besides; but that is secondary. They are pre-eminently scriptures of the

Knowledge and Practice of the Art of God and Science of the soul.

Such in outline are the findings of Sri Aurobindo. This is no hypothesis or theory put forward by him on deliberate study to base any chosen line of philosophy of life. His whole manner and occasion of entry into the Vedas was unpremeditated and accidental. As he himself explains, he looked into the Vedas to see if there was any evidence therein to justify the popular theories of racial animosity and conflict between the two peoples—Aryans and Dravidians of that early age—and of the utter incompatibility due to differences of origin between the northern Sanskritic and the southern Dravidian group of languages. And he was struck to find in the hymns much that threw light on and in some ways anticipated the ways of spiritual realisations he had been charting out independently of his own accord. Some of the Mantras lucidly explained experiences that had come about, but whose significances were not clear to him before. Besides, he recognised here very clearly certain deities which had manifested themselves to him in the course of his Tapasya. He pursued his enquiry, went straight to the Riks without aid of commentaries, understanding the meanings of words in their original sense with derivative significance—a course which made a consistent and connected reading possible—and was left in no doubt that there was a Secret in the Veda which explained the reverential homage paid to it from the Upanishads downwards. He expounded his method of approach and the lines of enquiry on which he proceeded with a summary of his conclusions in a series of articles in the *Arya*[1] under the title of *The Secret of the Veda*.

It may be asked, and quite relevantly, whether there is any corroboration to this finding besides the authority of Sri Aurobindo. We answer there is. The hymns in the Rig Veda[2] proclaim in unmistakable terms that the Mantras embody a secret, the Mantras are secret words which are known only to the Gods. *Asmākam rahasyāni stotrāṇi yuvayor-viditāni.* Says seer Vasishtha addressing Mitra and Varuna, *na vām niṇyāni acite abhūvan* (VII.61.5), 'To you are known our secret prayers, they are not concealed from you'. *Niṇyāni rahasyāni api stotrāni*, prayers even though they are secret, observes Sayana in his comment. Or look to the hymn of Vamadeva:

"O Agni, Disposer, to thee who knowest these secret words, fructuous I have uttered, I have sung, enlightened with thought and prayers."[3] The Riks revealed their meaning to man, but only to him who had equipped himself with the necessary purificatory discipline—*tapas*.

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[1] A philosophical Monthly conducted by Sri Aurobindo from 1914 to 1921.

[2] The Hymns of the Rig Veda can be taken to represent the Vedic hymnal literature in as much as the Mantras in the other Samhitas of the Trayi are mostly taken from the Rik Samhita, as pointed out in Section I.

[3] एता विश्वा विदुषे तुभ्यं वेधो नीथान्यग्ने निण्या वचांसि।
निवचना कवये काव्यान्यशंसिषं मतिभिर्विप्र उक्थैः ।। (IV. 3. 16)

Emphasising on this aspect of the Mantras, Yaska, the earliest extant Vedic Lexicographer who is also the last representative of the Nairuktas, quotes two Riks, one of which we shall reproduce here for the bold imagery adopted for explaining this truth. Drawing attention to this, Sri Aurobindo observes: "But all cannot enter into its secret meaning. Those who do not know the inner sense are as men who seeing see not, hearing hear not, only to one here and there the Word desiring him like a beautifully robed wife to a husband lays open her body."

"Otherwise seeing he sees not, hearing he follows not. But to him (to the qualified) she (Vak in the form of speech) reveals her form even as a loving well-drest wife disrobes herself to her husband."[1]

But why should secrecy have been necessary at all? Why should not the Rishis have given the knowledge they had attained to in a form which all could understand and benefit by? And are we sure we are not reading our own philosophical ideas into what after all may be just the propitiatory and invocatory songs that we are familiar with in all early societies among which the Vedic people certainly could be counted?

The early Aryans must have had their primitive and pastoral stages of development like any other people without doubt. But judging from the vigour of expression, the fullness and the force of it, the grace of symmetry and directness in the language, the aptness with which figures of poetry are handled and the sidelights which casual references throw on environmental life, it does look that these people were far removed from an age when men could only gape and babble. It rather looks more probable that they were a people who had touched a considerable mark of refinement and culture, possibly the summit of that particular cycle of civilisation. Like all early societies of that age they were governed by a strong symbolic mentality and an intuitive vision of things. The Intellect as such had not set in its reign and when Intellect is not, Nature gets its work fulfilled by means other than Intellect. They, at any rate, the most developed among them, had a natural and more unobstructed insight into the workings of the Universe around and a more intimate awareness of the inner world than is possible for us in this intellectual age. They did not stop with appearances. With a directness that is so natural to the leap of intuitive perception they recognised that all life was instinct with and was overshadowed by, something behind it. The outer hid the inner, the lower concealed the higher. They saw that the springs of life are operated effectively from behind and above it. Behind the distinctive operations of Nature, they saw the Powers that directed the elemental forces and sought to get at them by whatever means possible. They also perceived a definite rhythm of order in all the movements of Nature and looked for the Law that underlay it. It was the Law the Powers obeyed, the Law of the highest Power. These Powers, these Gods, wore in the beginning naturally a predominantly physical aspect. But gradually they came to be invested with a psychological character and Gods were looked upon not merely as deities presiding over and directing the powers of Nature but as entities that influenced and moulded the inner life of the individuals in the universe. They developed their own inner lines of discipline to reach out to these secret controllers of the destiny of men and Nature. But they kept their knowledge of the technique and results carefully guarded. Only the initiates were allowed to share it. This is the story of Mystics all over the world—wehether in Persia, Chaldea, Egypt or Greece. And India was no exception. The Rishis were precisely such leaders of society that attempted, persevered and succeeded in not only visioning and communing with these higher Powers or Gods but devoted their whole lives to develop the inner life for embodying the very gods within their own purified being and with their help to soar to the Highest. In this daring adventure of theirs, they relied almost exclusively on the aid, grace and support of the higher Powers, the Gods whose presence was invoked and sustained by the choicest offerings they were capable of, by the offering of the whole of themselves as a mite of love and adoration to the Gods. This is the Yajna which figures so prominently in the Hymns.

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[1] उत त्वः पश्यन्न ददर्श वाचमुत त्वः शृण्वन्न शृणोत्येनाम् ।
उतो त्वस्मै तन्वं वि सस्रे जायेव पत्य उशती सुवासाः ।। (X. 71. 4)

Such a higher knowledge as this could not be shared with all, with all men high and low, men with different levels of attainment, without vulgarising the sacred knowledge and exposing the society to possible misuse of the knowledge by the ignorant. But at the same time the knowledge had to be preserved. And this task was rendered easy by the state of the language and the manner of the use of words in that age. For at that stage of human development language as an expression of human thought and emotions had not acquired the fixity and finish which comes only after a definite maturity is reached. In our age, for instance, each word has a particular significance which is fastened on it by convention. We use a particular word to denote a particular object simply because all have come to accept by convention that this word means this. Any other word will serve the purpose for us as long as others accept the same meaning for it. Language has become mechanical. But in the early stages of development and formation of human speech, words were far from the conventional apex. They retained the multi-significance of the roots from which they were derived. The words themselves were the spontaneous expressions of responses evoked in the psychological and nervous being of man by phenomena of the objective and the subjective universes and hence each root throbbed with a self-evident meaning or meanings and needed no further explanation. Words were self-conscious and pregnant with roots and their derivative significances went side by side, so that one word could denote many objects even as the same object could be denoted by a number of words depending on how it was looked at.[1] Thus the word *Ghṛta* signified clarified butter, but it also meant brightness, as the root *ghṛ* means to shine or glisten. So also the word *go* meant among other things not only the quadruped but also "ray"—the root, from which it is derived, signifying movement. Now the Rishis with the help of such words and terminology arranged their thoughts in a system of parallelism. They borrowed self-evident figures from the environment, like the hills, rivers, forests etc. and placed behind them the psychological and spiritual truths of existence which they had perceived. Here also their choice was not arbitrary. The tree, *bhūruha*, for instance, signified human existence—since man also derived his existence from the earth; the rivers, the waters, signified currents of life-energy and consciousness by virtue of their common characteristics of ceaseless movement and the nourishment they impart and so on. Thus it came to be that the hymns in which they clothed their thought were understood in the inner sense only by those who knew how to look for it, and in the outer sense by the laity. The Rishis, however, took care to see that even in the outer meaning the Riks made sense and were applicable to the external worship and ritual which go almost with every society of the early ages. The terminology devised and the series of figures used were such that the hymns could be taken to apply to the outer ceremonials and sacrificial ritual while, for those who knew how to get at the esoteric sense, there was the knowledge relating to the inner worship, the inner *yajna*. The externals of worship and sacrifice were given considerable importance by these seers as training-ground for the less prepared, as vestibules through which they could enter the sanctum of the Inner Sacrifice when they were ready. Thus both the outer and the inner meaning are worked out side by side. But the psychological sense always predominates and at places it throws the external physical sense into the background. That is why certain portions do not make sense at all when interpreted in the ritualistic manner, while there is obtained generally a consistent meaning when the esoteric interpretation is applied.

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[1] Vide *Sphota and the Spoken Word* By Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry.

That there was thus more than one sense in which the Riks were to be understood was known not only to contemporary minds but to much later generations also. Thus Yaska[1] refers to the threefold interpretation, the threefold sense in which the Mantra was to be understood, viz. *ādhi-yajnika*, *ādhi-daivika* and *ādhyātmika*, the meaning as related to the sacrifice, *yajna*, as related to the gods, the cosmic Powers and as related to the life of the spirit. These three modes of interpretation seem to have been well recognised and each took to the particular interpretation to which he felt qualified. But there was the recognition of the prime importance of the spiritual interpretation. Yaska pointedly observes: "The yajnic is the flower and the daivic the fruit or the daivic the flower and the adhyatmic the fruit."[1] What the commentators say on this passage is worth-noting: "They are the knowledge of the sacrifice, knowledge of the gods and the knowledge of the Self. This is what is established by the whole Veda. If the Dharma promoting material prosperity (i.e.the Yajna which achieves it) is resorted to, then the knowledge of the gods is the fruit of it, the former becomes the flower, the latter the fruit. If on the other hand the Dharma leading to higher welfare is desired, then both the yajnic and the daivic become the flower; the daivic containing in itself the yajnic becomes the flower and the adhyatmic the fruit."

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[1] And Yaska came at least three or four thousand years after the Vedic Age, accepting the general computation of 700 to 400 B.C. as the period in which he must have lived.

This tradition of the spiritual import of the Vedas must have been current for a long time till it was eclipsed by the ritualist tradition receiving tremendous impetus and prestige at the hands of the Vedists, the Mimamsakas, and lastly of Sayana in the 14th century A.D. Even as late as the 13th century—a century before Sayana—Anandatirtha known as Maddhwacharya revived the tradition by writing commentary on the first 40 Suktas of the Rik Samhita. Even after Sayana, Sri Raghavendra Swami wrote the Mantrartha-manjari explaining and amplifying the Bhashya of Maddhwacharya and he has quoted therein an ancient Puranic text which says that the Vedas have three meanings—*trayorthāḥ sarva-vedeṣu.*[1]

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[1] याज्ञदैवते पुष्पफले देवताध्यात्मे वा । (Nirukta I. 6. 4)

The Mantras, the Riks themselves, we must note, were not poetical compositions, written to record experiences objective or subjective, in the manner of our poets and authors. They were not minted in the mart of mind. They had a deeper and other origin. The Rishis themselves disclaimed authorship of the Riks. They were not creators but *seers* who perceived the truth of the *mantra*. That is why Sayana observes, "they are no creators of the Veda but seers".[2] In the course of their *tapasyā*, the Rishis came across truths in an un-ideaed form which pressed upon them and through them for expression. From the depths and heights of the soul where they perceived the spiritual truths of Divine import the Rishis dug them out, *nirakhanan*, (Shatapatha Br. VII. 5.2.52), they carved them out, *takṣan* (RV. 1.62.13), to the best of their capacity and clothed them with human speech. The Rishis variously refer to the Inner Ocean, *antaḥ samudra* or the supreme ether, *paramam vyoma*, from where they received the *ṛks*. That is the explanation of the traditional ascription of non-human, *apauruṣeya* character to the Mantras.

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[1] Vide *Lights on the Veda* (pp. 84-85)

[2] न हि वेदस्य कर्तारो द्रष्टारः सर्वं एव हि।

If we approach the Riks with an understanding of this their background, with a readiness to get into the spirit of the age and proceed on the lines chalked out by Sri Aurobindo, the hymns do not appear any longer to be the simple folk-songs or abject supplications of a primitive, barbarian people they are fancied and made out to be. Instead, they reveal their true character of being the indices, the charts of the spiritual adventure of highly developed men who had pioneered into the realm of the Unknown. Seekers of Light they realised and enlisted the help and support of the Gods and Goddesses in their fight with the sons of Darkness who are ever after man to thwart his progress. They perceived the Gods face to face and established a living intercourse with them. Like children to the father, they gathered and delivered themselves now to Agni, now to Indra. They narrate with nostalgic fondness the thunder of the carriage, the hue of the chargers and the dazzle of the sun-bright apparel as they recall the visit of the Lord to partake of their choicest offering of Soma, the delightful draught of all life's experience. They call upon Agni to take birth in them as their Son and lead them as their Captain. They address the celestial Twins, Varuna and Mitra to cure with their vast purity and harmony the crookednesses and imperfections that disfigure the human life. They call upon the mighty Indra to smash the Enemy—the nescient Darkness—which baffles them so that the Waters (life-giving and life-building energies)—waters that flow *straight* and not zigzag, some of them stream *upwards*—

may debouch, inundate and fertilise the onward course of their journey. They describe the route of their ascent, 'from summit to summit', and speak picturesquely of the several breaks of the Dawn of illumination before they arrive at the threshold of the Sun Effulgent.

The Veda is a fitting commemoration of the supreme spiritual effort that was the high note of Vedic Civilisation. It forms the Prologue to the eternal Drama of endless Acts that is being enacted on the hallowed soil, *puṇya bhūmi*, of India ever since.

II

THE VEDIC SOMA

"We have drunk the Soma, we have become the immortals;
We have attained the Light, we have discovered the Gods..."

THUS runs the exultant chant of the Rishi in the eighth Mandala of the Rig Veda.[1] What are we to make out of this passage and similar ones which occur frequently in this ancient hymnal text? Are we to allow ourselves to be guided by the current conclusions of Western Scholars that these are the outpourings of primitive bards or priests under the intoxicating pressure of fermented liquor? In that case, there is no difficulty whatever in following the Riks for there would be nothing at all by way of sense or coherence to be looked for. Or, are we to take our stand on the ancient tradition which ascribes a spiritual or divine character to the Vedas and their *seers* and look for a deeper meaning behind the façade of banality whose very grotesqueness is so systematic as to arouse suspicion? We propose to examine this question in the light of the Thought and Interpretation of Sri Aurobindo, basing ourselves on proved grounds provided in the Commentary on the Rig Veda by Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry and in his other writings.

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[1] अपाम सोमममृता अभूम अगन्म ज्योतिरविदाम देवान् ।
(RV. VIII. 48. 3)

It has been a widely accepted conclusion among students of history and Vedic Religion and Society, not to speak of the uninformed generality of men, that Soma was the favourite drink in which the Rishis of those times freely indulged on ceremonial occasions. Scholars from the West who applied themselves to Vedic studies have been powerful exponents of this view and they have doubtless derived support from ritualistic literature that has grown round the Veda Samhitas. Briefly told this is their position.

The Aryans of the Sapta-Sindhu, who were the builders of the Vedic civilisation, we are told, had a special cult, the cult of Soma the like of which is not to be found in other societies of the time except in one other branch of the Aryans—those that lived in Iran. These latter had what is much the same ceremony—only under a different nomenclature, Haoma. Even today their descendants, the Parsis, perform the ceremony with substitute plants as the original plant is no longer available. We are told that in Zoroaster's time itself the juice of pomegranate had to be used. Now this Soma plant was one of the milk weeds or *asclepias acida*, probably *sarcostema viminalis* which grow on mountains, the quality that grew on the Mujawat mountains being specially renowned. This plant was brought from these mountains by savage Aryan nomadic tribes and sold at high prices. Dr. A.C. Das quotes Ragozin making these interesting observations: "......bargain was concluded according to a strictly prescribed ceremonial, the details of which seem singularly obscured and grotesque, until one learns that they had a symbolic meaning. The price (probably for a given quantity, though that is not mentioned) is a cow, light-coloured, or more precisely reddish brown, with light brown eyes, in allusion to the ruddy or golden colour of the plant."

The stalks of the plant, *amśu* were pressed between stones, *adri* or *grāvā*, by priests and the juice then mixed with water and purified, i.e., strained through a sieve, *pavitra*, made of sheep's wool. The strained juice trickled into a jar, *kalaśa*, or a larger vessel *drona* after which it was mixed with corn, *yavāśira*, or curds, *dadhyāśira* or milk, *gavāśira* or sometimes with honey and made to ferment. It was then offered in libation to the Gods and drunk by the worshippers. "This liquid had the power to elevate the spirits and produce a temporary frenzy...they found in it something divine; it was to their apprehension a god, endowing those into whom it entered with god-like powers; the plant which afforded it became to them the king of plants; the process of preparing it was a holy sacrifice; the instruments used therefore were sacred." (Prof. Whitney). Such a beverage which released them from awareness of the physical limitations to which they were naturally subject, into a wild freedom of imagination easily came to be an object of adoration. And what was dear to them, what was strength-giving to them, was dear and nourishing also to their Gods and consequently offered to them with elaborate ritual. Hence we find hymn after hymn chanted in glorification, in deification of Soma the creeper, Soma the juice, Soma the Deity. The entire ninth Mandala of one-hundred and fourteen hymns and a few hymns in other books are devoted to Soma.

We can very well understand the inevitability of these conclusions once the broad picture of the Vedic culture and society as etched out and filled in by Western scholarship—albeit with convenient bits of help from the indigenous ritualist—is accepted. For it has been an almost unanimous credo with them—exceptions there are, of course, but few and they are not unimportant—that the Vedic Aryans constituted a primitive society which had just emerged from the nomadic pastoral stage and was in the infant beginnings of the agricultural. They were, like other societies, elsewhere in the same stage, nature-worshippers; they were at the mercy of Nature-elements for their very life and sustenance and naturally had a spontaneous awe and terror of these elemental powers which they personified into gods and sought to propitiate them with choice offerings and flattering invocations. They offered tasty dishes of meat and flesh, processed products of milk and ghee and distilled juices of intoxicating properties; and of course they helped themselves liberally with these 'left-overs' with such a gusto and garrulousness of speech that one may be pardoned if he is irreverent enough to ask whether these ceremonial functions were not just excuses for these gourmands and sots to indulge their appetite.

But a doubt arises: why should these Aryans go through such elaborate ceremonies as the Soma Yaga or Yajna just to have their quaff of beverage? On their own account,—that of the Orientalists—these men lived in a society which was in the very beginnings of civilisation and there were at that time no moral codes or prohibitions such as came to be in later times, e.g., the commandment of the Sruti that liquor shall not be taken in, not given nor accepted, *madyam apeyam adeyam agrāhyam*, etc. They could have indulged in it as freely and nonchalantly as anybody can in such environments, without taking all the pains for going through these ceremonies which extended for any number of days from the one-day rite *aikāhika*, the twelve-day rite *ahina*, to the rite extending to one year and more, *satra*. And, was the Soma plant which was admittedly used on these occasions really so inebriating in its results as to reduce the Rishis to the level of commonplace boozers?

Sri Kapali Sastry draws pointed attention[1] to the fact that "the many things that are spoken of Soma cannot at all apply to creeper...The Soma plant is an extinct species and it was not easily available even thirty centuries ago. Twenty-four varieties of Soma plant are mentioned along with the places of their growth and their therapeutic virtues such as strength and longevity in the Sushruta Samhita (Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter

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[1] Vide *Further Lights: The Veda and the Tantra* (p. 12)

29), but the intoxicating property is not mentioned. It is difficult to imagine how sage after sage in hymn after hymn goes on singing the glory of this intoxicating drug. Surely there must be a measure even for depraved addicts."

Again, there are hymns which hardly make sense if Soma is taken to mean this drug. When, for instance, the Rishi exclaims:

> "O Thou, all-seeing, the illumining rays of Thee, who art the Lord, encompass all the abodes; Soma, with thy natural powers thou pervadest (the all) and flowest, thou art the king and Lord of the World",[1]

can Soma be understood to be a mere plant? What coherent sense does the verse yield if we accept the common interpretation? Or, to take yet another Rik wherein the Rishi himself leaves us in no doubt on the matter and declares:

"One thinks, when they have brayed the plant, that he
hath drunk the Soma's juice;
Of him whom Brahmans truly know as Soma no one
ever tastes."[2]

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[1] विश्वा धामानि विश्वचक्ष ऋभ्वसः प्रभोस्ते सतः परि यन्ति केतवः ।
व्यानशिः पवसे सोम धर्मभिः पतिर्विश्वस्य भुवनस्य राजसि ॥
(RV. IX. 86.5)

[2] सोमं मन्यते पपिवान्यत्संपिषन्त्योषधिम् ।
सोमं यं ब्रह्माणो विदुर्न तस्याश्नाति कश्चन ॥
(RV. X. 85. 3) Tr. by Griffiths.

The purport is unmistakable: even though all can drink the juice of the plant Soma by pressing it out, of the true Soma that is known to the wise the enjoyer is difficult to get.

What then is this Soma to which the Rishi refers so mysteriously?

II

It is here that the light Sri Aurobindo has shed on the esoteric significance of the Veda in vindicating the age-long tradition of the Hindus as a divine scripture, is of inestimable value to us. Repetition is no sin where it is relevant and we would recall here what we have stated elsewhere, the bare and salient features of Sri Aurobindo's interpretation in so far as it is necessary for our purpose.

The Rig Veda belongs to an age which was profoundly religious and a strong symbolic mentality governed its peoples. The Rishis, who were the leaders of the Aryan society of this age, were like the leaders of other societies elsewhere in similar epochs, essentially mystics to whom the realm of the soul, the sphere of the spirit was at least as real if not more than the physical external world in which they lived. They intuited and experienced the existence and governance of a Godhead behind and above the workings of the Universe, perceived a Law in its operations and set out to reach that higher Reality which was manifest to their natural and direct insight—as yet uncontaminated by the soil of Reason—as so many powers and personalities presiding over them, the Gods. To them the Gods were living entities governing and directing the movement of the universe without and within. These mystics built up and perfected a discipline to reach to the Gods, hewed and laid down the Path which has been trodden by seekers of the spirit for centuries ever since. They saw and recognised that the one supreme purpose of human life was to grow out of the animality with which it is sodden into progressively higher and higher stages of manhood with the eventual attainment of release into the altitudes of the Gods which could be scaled and won in the inner reaches of the Soul with appropriate means and effort. They also perceived that in creation they were confronted with the twin forces of Darkness and Light, the former, the *dasyus*, opposed and obstructed the progress of man away from their hold and fief towards the higher summits and the latter, the *devas* and their hosts, ever ready to help the mortal in his ascent towards their peaks. The Rishis sought and received the help of these benevolent deities by means of discipline and a special mode of life into the secrets of which only the initiates were admitted. All life was sought to be centred round this one supreme object and every activity, every item of life was invested with such a wealth of symbolic meaning as to turn attention naturally to the Presence, to the Godhead behind waiting to be approached and realised. It is in this light that the institution of Sacrifice which plays such a tremendously important part in the Vedic society is to be understood. To the Rishi, to the initiates, sacrifice, *yajna*, was the sole means of opening out to God; it was *adhvara*, the Path, *adhva*, that led him on. It was essentially an inner giving up of oneself and all one has—his mind, his life-power and his very physical being—to the Gods who received his offering and poured themselves and their riches into what was progressively becoming their own habitation. "This giving is Sacrifice, *Yajna*, in the Vedic system. If the Supreme Purusha by self-giving made possible the creation of this world-existence with its countless variety of living beings of which the most grown-up is the human being, man also can by self-giving earn the help of the Gods, of the higher Powers of the Godhead to new-create himself in the Spirit. For Sacrifice is the Law instituted by the Creative Godhead, the Purusha for self-extension in the world-existence; it is the Law by which creation is sustained, and it is also the law by which enlargement and growth into the image of the immortal Godhead is made possible. This secret of true and inner sacrifice was a common knowledge of the Vedic Mystics."[1]

And this inner Yajna it was that underlay the external sacrifice which "central fact of Vedic worship was arranged as a symbol of the great act of one's own offering of what one has and is to the Gods,—the higher Powers of universal Nature both within and without us—within as the psychological and spiritual, without as the forces of physical Nature. If the sacrifice as a whole is symbolic, all its elements, the objects used in the rites are also symbolic of the elements, the principles and truths of the inner sacrifice which is the true one by which man calls upon Gods to come and accept his offerings and by their help ascends to their Home, the Heaven, the Swar."[1]

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[1] Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry: *Further Lights: The Veda and the Tantra* (pp. 32-33)

The ceremonial act of worship with all its elaborate ritual and paraphernalia was built and developed as an institution of popular religion; but every care was taken to preserve the symbolic character of the ceremony whether in the *mantras* that were chanted, the designations and functions of the participants, the very objects of the offering, or the fruits of the offerings in the sacrifice. Needless to say that the outer ritual was meant to hold and turn the minds of men in the mass to things godly, while to the initiates it served as a kind of scaffolding for the inner edifice under erection. Thus, for instance, the cow, *go*, signified to them light, (the word *go* means at once cow and ray of light), the Light of Knowledge and the celebrated release of the cows by God Indra really referred to the gracious downpour of the flood of higher knowledge in the aspirant by the God of the pure and luminous Mind. So also when the worshipper offered milk or clarified ghee, shining in its liquid brilliance, to the Gods, what he offered in fact was his sum-total of of the workings of his knowledge-mind, his lucent output of *jnāna* which was indeed the yield of the cow of the Light-knowledge as manifested in his person. Similarly the horse, *aśva*, signified power, the dynamis of the vital energy which was offered to the Gods. These are the swift horses that are constantly prayed for from the Gods so that the journey could be hastened and the Gods riding on these chargers deal a swift blow to the robbers and marauders afflicting the traveller. So, the external objects, were there: the cow, the horse were brought and used as described in the hymns. Soma the creeper was collected, pressed and its juice used in the sacrifice without doubt. But there was something more behind the veil of the ceremonial procedure. If we consider the cult of Soma with this background, the seers of the sublime Vedic hymns emerge, not as the orgiasts carousing at the altar of Bacchus, but as pragmatic Mystics whose knowledge of the multiple possibility of the many-sided being of man is as profound and striking as the practical wisdom they have brought to bear on the working out of the potentialities of the individual in harmony with the eternal principles of Creation as they perceived it.

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[1] Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry: *Lights on the Veda* (p. 26)

III

"This haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain:
There are pitched desire's tents, grief's headquarters."

(Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, Book VI, Canto 2)

Whence has it come, this world, how is it sustained and what its purpose and direction? This is a question that has been asked ever since the dawn of thought on the horizons of man and it has been answered, when it has not been evaded, in a variety of ways. The most startling answer, however, is the clear, unambiguous declaration of the Vedantic sages: "From Ananda all existences are born, by Ananda they remain in existence, to Ananda they depart."[1] Creation is a Becoming, an outflow from the Being of Brahman in its expansive mood. The nature of Brahman is self-existent Delight. "The name of That is Delight; as the Delight we must worship and seek after it."[2] And what issues from it goes forth as an ebullition of its surge of Delight and the very stuff of the outgoing form is strung with that Delight. This creation, of which our world with its multitude of forms and beings is a picturesque part, is governed by the underlying fact of an inalienable Bliss. It is that Bliss, *Ananda*, at the core of every existence that maintains and truly enlivens it amidst all the crowd of contraries that press upon it. "For who could live or breathe if there were not this delight of existence as the ether in which we dwell?"[3] If to man, as he normally lives, it is pain and

[1] आनन्दाद्ध्येव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते। आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति। आनन्दं प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति॥
(Taittiriya Upanishad: III. 6) Tr. by Sri Aurobindo

[2] तद्ध तद्वनं नाम तद्वनमित्युपासितव्यम् . . .।
(Kena Upanishad: IV. 6) Tr. by Sri Aurobindo

[3] को ह्येवान्यात्कः प्राण्यात् यदेष आकाश आनन्दो न स्यात्।
(Taittiriya Upanishad: II. 7) Tr. by Sri Aurobindo

evil, sorrow and suffering that are more urgent facts of life rather than a stream of joy carrying on its bosom the boat of his soul, that is because of the limitations he is beset with, limitations which are imposed on him by an Ignorance which has well-nigh succeeded in separating being from being, the one from the other, each from the All. As a result, everyone feels himself separate from and opposed by the rest. He fronts their contacts not with an all-embracing joy, but a fearful shrinking. In a world of ignorance, as long as he lives the life of ignorance, doubtless pain and sorrow is the lot of man. But even there it is the secret delight of existence that sustains him. The soul of man derives a delight of its own from every experience, pleasurable or painful and it is this demand of the soul for higher and higher forms of delight that acts as the impelling force urging man to progress. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "In the egoistic human being, the mental person emergent out of the dim shell of matter, delight of existence is neutral, semi-latent, still in the shadow of the sub-conscious, hardly more than a concealed plenty covered by desire with a luxuriant growth of poisonous weeds and hardly less poisonous flowers, the pains and pleasures of our egoistic existence. When the divine conscious-force working secretly in us has devoured these growths of desire, when in the image of the Rig Veda the fire of God has burnt up the shoots of earth, that which is concealed at the roots of these pains and pleasures, their cause and secret being, the sap of delight in them, will emerge in new forms not of desire, but of self-existent satisfaction which will replace mortal pleasure by the Immortal's ecstasy."

It is this sap of delight, *rasa*, the draught of all experience and life that is called Soma in the parlance of the Vedic Mystics. The Deity presiding over this Rasa of life is Soma, the Lord of Delight. This Rasa represents the essence of all experiences and movements which the individual being has derived and accumulated in his venture in the field of life and it forms his means of subsistence, urge for growth and seed for rebirth. And as the most priceless possession of man it is the choicest gift that could be offered to the Gods whose presence and aid is invoked by him. This substantial element in the being of man coming as it does from the eternal Principle of Existence, the Ananda aspect of the Sachchidananda, is the immortal juice, *amṛta*, which is the food of the Gods, *somo va annam*, and most prized of all the offerings man is capable of laying before them. But it is not every one who can feel and consciously separate this streak of delight in the depths of his being from the murk of desires and passions, joys and griefs that dominate and disfigure his normal existence. It is not only to be felt and separated, but tended and developed into a distinct articulation and shape, endowed with a body as it were. Thus developed Soma is indeed the protector, the guardian of our bodies,[1] whose sway must be rendered unrestricted and extended to every part of the body.[1] For only so do the infirmities and diseases lose their strength and vanish into darkness,[2] and the body enabled to get closely knit in every joint, like a car secured by straps,[3]—a condition which the human system has to fulfil of necessity if it is to respond successfully to the demands imposed on it in the course of the Adventure.

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[1] नस्तन्वः गोपाः (RV. VIII. 48. 9)

The Rishis give a great importance to the extraction and offering of this very cream of life from their being to the higher Powers and Gods and they developed the necessary inner discipline to achieve the object. For, quoth they,

> "He tastes not that delight who is unripe and whose body has not suffered the heat of the fire; they alone are able to bear that and enjoy it who have been prepared by the flame."[4]

A physical system which has not been subjected to the purifying fire of arduous *tapasya* is like a raw earthen vessel, insufficiently baked, which splits and spills what is poured into it. It is only when the body of man, the *mortar* has received enough of the 'benign blows' of the *grāvā* or *adri*, the *vajra* weapon of the God above that the hold of *tamas* and other opposing forces of darkness on him loosens and cracks, making it possible for it to be supple enough to yield the *rasa*, the delight of all experience, for offering to the Gods. A dynamic and enlightened life-force stimulates the extraction of this sap with every vibrant movement of its own and sets in current a stream of the Wine of delight flowing towards the eager hosts of Gods or pours it into the purifying sieve, *pavitra*, of the psycho-emotional and higher mental layers awakened to knowledge and light, whence purified of dregs, it is strained into the *camasa* or *kalaśa* of the being of the worshipper and kept ready for the delectation of Indra, the Lord of the Divine Mind who rejoices at the gift.[1] Strengthened and contented by this nectar of delight, Indra the monarch of the Gods, pours fresh strengths and Waters of conscious-energy into the Yajamana, himself grows into the person of the latter and (with the hosts of other Gods who partake of the Cup in the measure of their share) prepares him to transcend his humanity, and eventually admits him into companionship in the realms celestial,

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[1] गात्रेगात्रे निषसत्था

[2] अप त्या अस्थुरनिरा अमीवा निरत्रसन् तमिषीचीरभैषुः। (RV. VIII. 48. 11)

[3] रथं न गावः समनाह पर्वसु। (RV. VIII. 48. 5)

[4] अतप्ततनूर्न तदामो अश्नुते शृतास इद्वहन्तस्तत्समाशत। (RV. IX. 83. 1) Tr. by Sri Aurobindo

> "...In that realm where they move even as they list,
> In the third sphere of inmost heaven where lucid
> worlds are full of light."[2]

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[1] न सोम इन्द्रं असुतो ममाद नाब्रह्मणो मघवानं सुतासः

[2] यत्रानुकामं चरणं त्रिनाके त्रिदिवे दिवः।
लोका यत्र ज्योतिष्मन्तः . . . .
(RV. IX. 113. 9) Tr. by Griffiths.

So then, the Soma that figures in the hymnal outpourings of these patriarchs of the ancient Aryans is not the liquor of the addict. Seemingly it is that, but it is not that everywhere in the hymns or essentially that even in rituals. True, the creeper Soma was pressed for juice at the sacrifical functions; true also that it was exhilarating as it has been so praised and sung in hundreds of passages. But the real significance of Soma does not allow itself to be exhausted by this puerile explanation as it is unmistakably proclaimed in the hymns themselves. Soma is Wine indeed, but it is the Wine of Immortal Delight aflow in the core of every living being, keeping it alive and growing, the blissful essence of which the very Gods are avid. It is this feast of Delight on the inner *vedi*, altar of the Rishi at which the Gods arrive in their numbers to partake of the Cup in which the blessed worshipper offers the purified sap of his existence as the crown and fulfilment of his life-long *yajna*, sacrifice, that is symbolised by the Ritual where 'Indu flows for Indra's sake',[1] the Feast whose glorious culmination leads him to proclaim:

"We have drunk the Soma, we have become the immortals;
We have attained the Light, we have discovered the Gods."...

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[1] इन्द्रायेन्दो परि स्रव (RV. IX. 113. 9)

III

THE VEDIC SOMA (2)

In the foregoing dissertation the subject of Soma in the Rig Veda was discussed having in view the interpretation by Western scholars of the institution of the Soma Sacrifice of the Vedic times and the latter is, indeed, buttressed by the ritualistic tradition of ancient Vedists of India. Also our own approach was outlined on the basis of the esoteric interpretation revived and brought to light by Sri Aurobindo. It is proposed in this short paper, to substantiate those conclusions by means of a direct appeal to the authority of the Rishis themselves, taking up a sufficiently adequate and representative number of Riks from the Samhita to illustrate the soundness of our position and even an inevitable, natural sense of these litanies of the ancient Mystics.

We may note, by way of recapitulation, that to western scholars, Soma is only the name of a plant whose juice, properly treated, had certain intoxicating properties. The hymnodists of the Vedas made free use of this juice in their sacrifices to the gods and made quite a ceremony of their own partaking of it in the name of the deities to whom it was offered. The gods were fond of this intoxicant and it endowed them with prowess to smash the enemy of their supplicant. And no wonder, the bards celebrated the virtues of the Soma-drink in hundreds of Riks apotheosising the plant that yielded the juice, the moon presiding over the plant-kingdom, and even the very act of pressing the Soma, in superlative laudatives to a degree and extent that is sickening, in 'an intolerable monotony reaching its climax in the ninth book'. Support to this conclusion about the Soma cult is sought to be derived from a parallel institution of the Haoma sacrifice among the early Iranians, a sister race of the Aryan settlers in the plains of the Punjab.

The indigenous scholarship on the Vedas, at any rate that tradition which has come to be accepted as by and large the most authoritative—the line of interpretation stably moulded and fixed in the Commentary of Sayana —generally lends support to this position. The Soma plant, was brought from the mountains where it grew in plenty and it was cleansed and pounded with stones, *grāva* or *adri*, at a special ceremony to the accompaniment of community ritual; the plant so pounded was pressed with the ten fingers of both hands, *mrijanti daśa kṣipaḥ*; the juice thus derived was brown, *babhru*, tawny, *hari*, or ruddy and reddish, *aruna aruṣa*, and had a fragrant smell, *surabhi*, and was sweet to the palate, *svādu*, *madhu*. The juice was received in two platters, *phalaka*, diluted with water and filtered through a strainer, *pavitra*, of sheep's wool, *aṇvāni meṣyaḥ*, and held in a large vessel, *drona kalaśa*, which was covered with an ox-hide, *gor adhi twaci*. This liquid was compounded in three different ways: mixed with milk, it was called *gavāśira soma*, with curds *dadhyāśira soma* and with corn it was known as *yavāśira soma*. The beverage was then offered in libation in cups, *camu* or *camasa* to the Gods, Indra, Agni, Vayu etc. who are ever avid of this nectarous food, *amṛta*.

It is not that we deny historicity to these ceremonial functions. On the other hand, the esoteric interpretation insists that these external rites with all the elaborate details did form a feature of the popular religion of the times. Only that was not all, the whole truth. Behind the ritual there lay a deeper significance. The outer act was a mask and a symbol of a concrete happening in the inner life of the Seer, the Rishi. Thus, sacrifice, the central institution of the Vedic religion, stood for and registered the progress and consummation of an inner sacrifice on the part of the Rishi by which he consecrated himself to the Gods towards whom he aspired. All the details of the ritual were arranged in such a manner, even the very names of the items used are so significant, that they constantly call attention of the initiate to what they stood for. And the Soma offering—regarded as the most ancient, *pratnamit*, rite, and in fact the progenitor and primeval soul of sacrifice, *ātmā yajnasya pūrvyah*,—is indeed a most glorious illustration of this truth. The existence of the plant *soma* on the hills, the pounding by stones, pressing by ten fingers, filtering through the sieve, pouring into the *kalaśa* covered with an ox-hide for retention of the dregs and finally the offering in cups or bowls—all these are factual details of the Soma rite; but each one of them conceals with a bewitching transparency a deeper truth of immediate relevance to the worshipper. In the course of his self-giving to the Gods, in the path of ascent to the heights, the Rishi desires to offer the best in himself to his divine benefactors. And what he offers is the essence, the substantial element of all experience and realisation in his life, drawn and treasured by the soul as the delight of its adventure in life. This is the sap of his existence which determines all the movements of his being and the outflowings of his consciousness, the *soma*. The Vedic mystic invites the Gods to partake of this wine of life which he has distilled. It is this process of finding and giving a distinct articulation to the element of delight in life within oneself, of increasing and purifying it into a well-shaped stream of libation to the Gods as the highest and most comprehensive mode of self-giving that underlies the figure of the Soma rite and it is this truth that invests what would otherwise be meaningless repetitive chants with a significance and value that students of the spiritual history of mankind can ill afford to miss. It stands there veiled, but the veil is not always thick and opaque; here it is transparent, there it is thin or ripped open by the truth which boldly leaps into the foreground. Thus there are hymns which lend themselves to a smooth interpretation both ways; there are some which make no sense if read only in the external meaning even as there are a few which are avowedly for the purposes of apparently external ritual.

Let us take a few Riks on the origin, the dwelling place of Soma. The Soma is described to have been obtained from the mountains. Doubtless, this is so both literally and figuratively. For to the mystics of the Veda, the hill or the many-plateaued mountain stood for Existence —the universal or the individual—with its rising tiers of consciousness standing on the solid base of physical matter at the bottom. Soma, the essential delight of being, constitutes the very marrow of all manifested existence and to be found with greater ease as one grows higher and higher into the altitudes of one's being and consciousness. Hence it is said that Soma streams are coursing in the mountains, that they are to be found at the loftiest heights.

Growing in the mountain heights, coursing like chargers in action, they (streams of Soma) are released for the advent of the Gods.[1]

The streams of Soma, the currents of *ananda* grow in volume and intensity as one reaches the higher levels of the hill of being; impediments for their free flow diminish as the lower regions are left behind and they rush forth precipitating the advent of the Gods by the pressure of their call.

Agni and Soma, one of you Matarishwan brought from Heaven; the Falcon wrenched the other from the Hill.

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[1] असृग्रन् देववीतयेऽत्यासः कृत्व्या इव। क्षरन्तः पर्वतावृधः॥
(IX. 46. 1)

Increasing by the Word you have extended the world wide for Yajna (Sacrifice).[1]

Matarishwan i.e. Vayu, the deity presiding over *prāṇa*, the life-force, has brought down Agni, the divine Will with the flame of aspiration, from his original abode above and set him in the frame of the Rishi. Agni is awakened in the being of the seeker as a result of his *tapasya* in which the life-dynamis plays a leading role. For it is only when the life-energy is yoked to the will for a higher life that the real journey of the soul gathers momentum and the entire being is set aflame with a growing and all-consuming fire of aspiration. If Agni is thus lighted by an enlightened life-force, Soma, the stream of Delight is rendered palpable as a result of a strenuous endeavour by the soul in spotting it in the difficult heights of the being and rending it down the slope. It is there on the summit of the hill (of existence) waiting to be tapped by the aspiring soul which is signified by the bird Falcon in the Rik. The hymn of praise, the Word of joyous gratitude which proceeds vibrating from within the being of the Seer, goes to strengthen and further the growth of Agni and Soma as a result of which there is a happy increase in the extent of his being open and pliable for self-giving to the higher Powers in the inner Sacrifice, the Yajna.

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[1] आन्यं दिवो मातरिश्वा जभारामथ्नादन्यं परि श्येनो अद्रेः ।
अग्नीषोमा ब्रह्मणा वावृधानोरुं यज्ञाय चक्रथुरु लोकम् ॥ (I. 93. 6)

We need not enter here into the legends which are serviced by the Brahmanas and by Sayana for explaining the Rik in the usual external sense. Suffice it to note that there is really no need to go to mythology for understanding what is plainly a Rik of self-evident spiritual import verifiable in the life of every seeker of the Higher Truth.

He discovered the treasure from heaven set in the secrecy like the nestling of a bird, concealed closed, in Rock, enclosed in the unending Rock (*of Existence*). *Most Angiras-like, the bolt-armed Indra strove to possess the Pen of Rays, the stall of cows as it were, he laid bare the impulsions that lay hidden, opened the doors, the impulsions that lay hidden.*[1]

Indra discovers the treasure Soma, brought from heaven, which lies concealed in secrecy. It is not to be seen by the naked eye. It is carefully hidden like the young one of a bird in the spaces of a rock. The nectar of Delight lies hidden (below the surface) within the material body of man. His physical frame is likened to a rock because of the substantiality of Matter with which it is endowed and by reason of which he stands erect and firm like a rock amid the seas and storms of the myriad forces of so many planes that constantly blow around him. This rock of matter is enclosed in the larger and infinite Rock of Existence. The figure is worked out to the full and we have a striking picture of the seed of Delight underlying all creation being brought down from the Heaven and deposited deep within the hard core of the material form which again stands encircled and enveloped by a vaster extension of materiality that is the Physical Existence. When man has advanced far enough in his inner endeavour to take his normal stand on the levels of the purer mind, above the meshes of physical and sense-bound mentality, the sap of Delight within the being is spotted by Indra who is the Power reigning on these altitudes and partaking of this rapturous treasure, he proceeds to fight the battle of the adorer to recover and win the multitude of the Rays of illumination that lie in the nether cells of his being enmeshed and covered over by trappings and overgrowths of ignorance and inconscience. When he sets out on this mission he is like Angirasa—the famed Flame-thrower, the renowned Agni Power of the mystics in whose wake and stir the obstructions and grossnesses of darkness and falsehood are burnt out of existence; he is armed with his thunderbolt—his unfailing weapon *Vāk*, the Word that brooks no opposition and scatters all clouds of gloom and impediment in its reverberating advance. He releases the whole army of the innate impulsions of the soul towards progress and growth, from the hold of inertia, *tamas*, and blindness of ignorance so that released into motion they may energise the whole of the being for the dynamic venture.

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[1] अविन्दद्दिवो निहितं गुहा निधिं वेर्न गर्भं परिवीतमश्मन्यनन्ते अन्तरश्मनि।
व्रजं वज्री गवामिव सिषासन्नङ्गिरस्तमः।
अपावृणोदिष इन्द्रः परीवृता द्वार इषः परीवृताः॥ (I. 130. 3)

This Soma's stream (the current of rapturous Delight) has come down from the loftiest (heights), and discovered (or possessed) the Rays (of illumination) in the wide spaces, hidden somewhere within the Hill (of being).

This stream of Soma courses clear for Thee, Indra, like lightning from heaven, thundering with the clouds.[1]

The lofty heights from which course down the Soma streams are the high altitudes of the being of the mystic where untrammelled by the twists and obstacles of desire, passion and falsehood common on the lower plains of human existence, the essential Delight of life flows forth in freedom. When the Aryan aspirant reaches these heights and establishes a free channel of communication with the rest of his being, the riches of these altitudes flow down to it in profusion. And the one capital result of this free movement of the wine of Soma is the recovery of the rays of illumination hidden within the unexplored expanse of oneself. For behind the surface exterior of man is extended his larger self—the subliminal being rising from the depths of the subconscient to the heights of the superconscient—and there lie concealed and untapped in these expanses, *urvīḥ*, rays of Knowledge. The revelation of these Rays follows upon the unimpeded flow of Soma in the being of man. The streams of Soma, flushed with the recovery of these Rays of Illumination, rush forth in scintillation to meet their enjoyer, Indra.

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[1] एषा ययौ परमादन्तरद्रेः कूचित्सतीरूर्वे गा विवेद।
दिवो न विद्युत्स्तनयन्त्यभ्रैः सोमस्य ते पवत इन्द्र धारा ॥ (IX. 87. 8)

We may ask, in passing, how could Soma, if it be a mere plant, flow from lofty heights and how, indeed, find the Rays of Illumination?

We may take a Rik or two where more places of the Soma's dwelling are mentioned. Here for instance:

> *The juices of Soma that have been pressed out from (places) far above and beyond or quite near, or here in the bowl of Sharyanavat.*
>
> *Those expressed among the straightforward (righteous peoples), those pressed out among the active (sacrificers) or in the passage of the Rivers (or houses) or expressed among the Five Peoples.*[1]

The juices of Soma are here described by the Rishi in their various locations. Those expressed raptures of ecstatic delight may be felt and experienced quite close to the physical being on the subtilised levels; or they may be aflow only in the deepest depths or rarefied heights of the being; or they may be coursing palpably in the physical frame of the worshipper, in the bowl of *Sharyanavat*. Sayana, and following him the western scholars, have interpreted *Sharyanavat* to mean a lake in the region of the Kurukshetra. But in the context, and in the light of its repeated mention elsewhere, we are persuaded to believe that it rather stands for the bowl in which the Soma Rasa is held. And this in its inner significance refers to the sanctum in the heart of the invoking individual. Particularly the 113th hymn in the ninth Mandala leaves us no option but to interpret it in the way we have done. It speaks of Indra drinking in *Sharyanavat* where the Light eternal is established. Can such a splendour be spoken of as laid in a lake? Or is it rather that it signifies the the body, *ādhāra*, which has been so purified and elevated by spiritual discipline, *tapasyā*, of the worshipper that there is in it a constant dwelling of the higher Light to which he has opened himself and Indra is invited to partake of the nectarous delight that is self-gathered in that luminous bowl?

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[1] ये सोमासः परावति ये अर्वावति सुन्विरे। ये वादः शर्यणावति।।
य आर्जीकेषु कृत्वसु ये मध्ये पस्त्यानाम्। ये वा जनेषु पञ्चसु।।
(IX. 65. 22-23)

Again, the juices are expressed among the *ārjīkas*,—the straightforward, righteous peoples. It is only those who have left behind the crooked and tortuous ways of ignorance and falsehood and live in the ways of Truth, straight and right, that can hope to realise and offer the Soma to the Gods. The same truth is hinted in another Rik (1.134.6) where the Rishi calls upon Vayu to drink the Soma juice poured by invoking peoples who divest themselves of *the taint of sin—vavarjuṣīṇām viśām.*

They are pressed out among the *active* i.e. among those who are ceaselessly engaged in the inner sacrifice of consecration and this again implies a life-time labour of reorienting all the movements of oneself inwards and fusing them into one orchestrated melody rising in hymnal chant to the Divine Lord.

The juices are in the passage of the *rivers*,[1] the flowing streams of Conscious Force that are active in the being of the awakened individual. In the ordinary unenlightened human being it is a more or less mechanical or dumb life-energy that functions driven by any motive that gains ascendancy at the moment. But as one grows in knowledge and self-culture, he begins to grow in consciousness also; more and more of self-awareness and freer consciousness that is within begins to come forward and progressively govern his movements. The workings of this consciousness-force, its streams of dynamism flowing on the various levels of one's being, as enlightened thought-currents, self-effectuating impulsions of life-energy, high-soaring jets of the emotions and the like are likened by the Vedic mystics to the ever-flowing rivers which know no stagnation and fertilise the fields through which they course. It is in the run and free movement of these waters or rivers of conscious force that the nectar of Soma glides smooth.

Or, among the *five peoples*: Sayana would have *pañca janāḥ*, Five Peoples to mean the four castes and the Nishadas, the fifth caste, *pañcama*, to make up the five. But that presupposes the division of the Vedic society into the fourfold classes—a reading which cannot be corroborated by history. The said division was a development in the post-Rigvedic age, certainly unknown in the times of the Vedic Rishis. This expression *pañca janāḥ* was the object of diverse interpretations even bofore Sayana. Sri Kapali Sastry draws pointed attention[1] to a passage in the Brihad Devata (VII.67-70) recording the various meanings attached to this much disputed term. The text says that the *ātmavādins*—those who believed in the spiritual meaning of the Vedas—hold that the *Pañca Janāḥ* are Sight, Audience, Mind, Voice and Life, *cakṣuḥ, śrotram, mano, vāk ca prāṇaśca-ety ātma-vādinaḥ*. The Five Peoples, are really the Beings that people the five worlds, *pañca kṣitayaḥ*, in the ascending order of existence beginning from the Earth plane. Creation is not a unitary system: it is a manifestation in gradations, consisting of Planes of Existence which have been classified in different ways; the classification relevant to our purpose is the Earth, the Life-world, the Mind-world, the world of Vijnana and the world of Delight—*anandamaya-loka*. And Soma, the draught of *ananda* which sustains creation at its core is to be found on all the planes in its extension—amidst all the Peoples of the Five Worlds. Whatever be the world, it is Soma that is the secret of its existence and it is the effusion of this wine of Delight that is the purpose of its manifestation.

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[1] *Pastyānām* may mean also dwelling places. In that case it signifies the human body which is the dwelling place of the inner *yajamāna*, even as in the outer sense it would mean the house of the worshipper.

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[1] *Rig Veda Bhashya*, p. 57.

The following Rik is even more explicit:

Thou flowest in three extended strainers and cleansed, gatherest into one. Thou art adorable, O Indu, the Donor of gifts, Giver to givers.[1]

The three extended strainers are described by Sayana himself as Agni, Vayu and Surya. And we know that Agni is the presiding deity of the Earth, the physical plane; Vayu of the mid-world, the life-plane and Surya of the Heavens—the mind and still higher regions. It is through these three severally extended filters, as it were, that the nectarous Delight flows into creation, into the created being. Flowing through each of the different strainer-planes, the Soma acquires an expression proper to the principle governing the respective order of existence. And yet when discovered and released on all these three layers of one's being, it gathers into one movement and pours itself in the single strainer—the purified body of the worshipper.

We find the following Rik equally unequivocal:

Drink, O Indra, this effusion, exalted, immortal and delightful. In the Home of Truth, have flowed to Thee, streams of the brilliant (Soma).[2]

[1] सं त्री पवित्रा विततान्येष्यन्वेकं धावसि पूयमानः ।
असि भगो असि दात्रस्य दातासि मघवा मघवद्भ्य इन्दो ।।
(IX. 97. 55)

[2] इममिन्द्र सुतं पिब ज्येष्ठममर्त्यं मदम् ।
शक्रस्य त्वाभ्यक्षरन्धारा ऋतस्य सादने ।। (I. 84. 4)

How could the juice of a plant be described as immortal? Besides, what is the relevancy of the *Home of Truth* to the flow of fermented wine? It can flow, as it does always, in the home of falsehood as well.

Indra, the Lord of the triple world, is there above in his Home of Truth—the Supernal Light. And when the Rishi has so far advanced in his pursuit of self-giving and so much energised himself with the dynamis of the Spirit that the nectarous essence of his being raised to white-heat of purity and luminousness streams in abundance, unimpeded, towards the Divine In-taker in his own station, he calls upon the Lord to accept the delightful and excellent Drink now rendered immortal. The Streams of Soma acquire an excellence of quality, an undecay of life and a supernal brightness of hue when they reach the Home of Truth.

So much for the origin of Soma. As for the Pressing-stone, *grāvā*, the ten fingers that are used for the pressing, the implements and other details connected with the Soma Rite, we shall take them up and show how they all take their significant place in the scheme of these symbolic rites.

IV

THE VEDIC SOMA (*3*)

In the previous two parts of this study on the Vedic Soma, the general misconception—both popular and learned—about the Vedic institution of the Soma Rite has been sought to be removed by a systematic presentation of the truths that are hidden and quite often open in the utterances of the Rishis themselves. We are enabled to uncover the veil of symbols because of the clues provided in Sri Aurobindo's symbolic interpretation of the hymns of the Rig Veda. Soma outwardly is, indeed, the juice of the Soma plant. But in reality it is the sap of delight, the essential ecstasy that is at the root of life. This substantial element of all the life's experiences, the Soma, is offered by the Rishi to the Gods as his choicest self-giving. The external rite ceremonialising this sacred act is closely symbolic of the inner Yajna. The Mountain, the Rock, from where the Soma is obtained is the Hill of existence from which flow the streams of Ananda. The various implements used in the rite are but significant elements of the agency at work in the deeper life of the Mystics. We now proceed to deal with these implements.

Soma, the wine of Delight in Existence is there in the being of man. To set it flow freed from obstructions and canalise its abundant streamings from the soul's offering to the Gods is the object of the *Yajamāna*, the mystic engaged in the inner Sacrifice. But even as the Soma-juice does not flow by itself, the essence of all experiences and delight does not flow of itself. The *Plant* that holds it has got to be pounded, subjected to pressure and even hard blows, before it softens, gets pliant and begins to yield the sap. In the external rite what is usually used for the purpose is the stone, *grāva*, *adri*, though at times we find mention of the mortar, *ulūkhala*, in which the pounding was done. The correspondence between the inner process and this outer parallel is readily perceived on a reading of a few of the relevant Riks.

There where the broad-based Stone is high above to press (*the Soma juice out*), *O Indra, drink with eagerness the pourings of the mortar.*[1]

What is this Stone that is based broad? Why is it high above? What is the significance of the mortar in the inner sacrifice?

"Indra is above, he is called upon to come *down*, *ava*, to drink *ava jalgulaḥ*, the drippings of the Soma juice from the mortar. In the ritualistic interpretation, *grāva*, stone is taken to be the pestle. Now there is a discrepancy. It is clearly the pressing stone and not pestle. The scholiast calls it pestle because there is the mortar, *ulūkhala*, in the second line. Pestle and mortar are of wood and used in the Vedic rites to separate the chaff from the grain, they are not used to extract the Soma juice. *Grāvā* is stone used to beat the Soma creeper, so that it becomes soft and pressed, yields the juice which is received in the platters. Here in the very first Rik of the hymn the seer significantly refers to the '*stone above*', *ūrdhva*; he does not say it is raised, though for the external rite it can be so interpreted. This stone which is above is Indra's weapon, the *vajra*. Indra is above, his weapon is above; by the blow dealt by the *vajra* even as Vritra the darkened cloud of adverse forces and ignorance and inertia vanishes, so also the hard matter of body loses its hardness, becomes plastic, free from *tamas*, inertia and its brood of adverse conditions and forces that oppose the release of Rasa, the delight of all experiences to be offered to the Gods, the Cosmic powers of the Godhead. Here the *mortar* is the material body, and it must be noted that earth and every product of it such as the tree, and anything made of wood is symbolic of the physical body and even life and mind as products of the body are very often treated symbolically as of earth and earthen material; of this again later on. This then is the gist of the first Rik. Here this body symbolised by the mortar, *ulūkhala*, has yielded the Soma, the *rasa*, its sap, the essence and essential delight for the acceptance of Indra, the Divine mind, the God of the luminous mind, the higher consciousness in the pure mind of heaven, the ruler of this triple world of Matter, Life and Mind. The Rishi addresses Indra invoking his presence to come down and drink the Rasa whose extraction was possible because of the benign blows of the

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[1] यत्र ग्रावा पृथुवुध्न ऊर्ध्वो भवति सोतवे ।
उलूखलसुतानामवेद्विन्द्र जल्गुलः ॥ (I. 28. 1)

grāvā, the Vajra weapon of Indra himself. Note that this stone is the Vajra weapon, not the gross thunderbolt which is meaningless in the inner sacrifice, but the *Vāk*, the Word wide-based in the Vast above, *ūrdhva-budhna pṛthu-budhna*, as can be gathered from repeated reference to it as such in many lines of the hymns of the Rig Veda, and so explained in the Brahmanas in their modes of symbolic interpretation of the Vedic rituals and Vedic mantras. This Vak, the Word or speech whose source is the Vast above is really that of the luminous mind of heaven, of the higher consciousness and when it functions, its vibrations rush forth and blow off the din and dust of the lower triple body of mind, life and matter. It illumines the mind, energises the life-force, drives out inertia from the physical body and softens it so that it releases the *rasa* of all the experiences it earned through the life and heart and mind. This, then, is the real character and function of the *grāva* that it is the Word of power issuing forth from the higher consciousness which is the domain of Indra, pregnant with the light of knowledge, but dynamic in its vibrant movement that removes all kinds of coverings and effects with the blow it deals out to the being of the worshipper, *yajamāna*, the release of the essence of all delight lying latent and hidden in the vessel, *ādhāra*, of the human being which is indicated by the symbol of the wooden mortar, *ulūkhala*." (Sri Kapali Sastry)[1]

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[1] *Further Lights: The Veda and the Tantra* (pp. 125-128).

Where the seat of sacrifice is piled in the sacred work of extension (for the advent of the Gods), where the resplendent Word proclaims his glory aloft in the Heaven (of Mind), where the Stone rings, voiceful chanter of hymn—in all these Indra delights as they reach him.[1]

If Indra is to answer the human call, if he is to respond to the invocation by coming down from the heavenly heights to dwell and increase his empire in the being of the Rishi, it is essential that conditions which hold a compelling attraction for him be built up. The inner *barhis*, the sacred seat, the sanctified dais of the heart must be enlarged and furbished to receive the hosts of the assembly of Gods. The speech, the *vāk*, of the Rishi should have attained a life and a power that radiate in splendour and carry on their wings to the very abode of Indra, the Heaven, the heart's tribute of love, the soul's call of yearning. And the *Stone must ring*. The Voice, the Word, the concentrated and concretised charge so to say of the vibrations of the Higher Consciousness deriving from the domain of Indra should be actively at work, resounding in its ceaseless task of refining and remoulding the body for the higher purpose. The rhythms of its onslaughts on the elements that arrest and oppose, the crash of the crusts that impede and the peals of its victories are music to the ears of Indra and there he must surely turn.

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[1] बर्हिर्वा यत्स्वपत्याय वृज्यतेऽर्को वा श्लोकमाघोषते दिवि ।
ग्रावा यत्र वदति कारुरुक्थ्य१स्तस्येदिन्द्रो अभिपित्वेषु रण्यति ॥
(I. 83. 6)

Slayer of Vritra, mount thy car, the horses are yoked to it by our Word of mantra. May the stone with its voice draw thy mind towards us.[1]

The Rishi calls upon Indra to speed down towards himself. The chariot is got ready; the heavenly horses—the swiftnesses that overlook time and space—are yoked to the carriage by the reins of the Mantra, the inspired word proceeding out of his spiritualised heart-dynamo; the vibrations of his utterance here on earth, reach out to the heaven and fashion the reins for the gallopers of Indra. The stone is voiceful—the weapon of Indra exults in the progress of its work of softening the resistance of the human body, and the Rishi hopes that its clang of delight would draw Indra thither ere long. Note the sequence: first the *brahman*, then the *grāvā*. The word-weapon of the God of the divine Mind begins to work tangibly and audibly only after the seeker has risen and advanced far enough to be able to give full and undiminished expression, to transmit in a living body of speech worthy of its intensity, the inner call of the Soul's Aspiration to the Lord above.

O Vāyu, cross the many slumberers (forces of inertia) and enter you both the house where the Stone vibrates voiceful. (Where) Indra and you, both enter (the house) the vāk (voice) of the happy truth, the Dawn, is beheld

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[1] आ तिष्ठ वृत्रहन्रथं युक्ता ते ब्रह्मणा हरी ।
अर्वाचीनं सु ते मनो ग्रावा कृणोतु वग्नुना ॥ (I. 84. 3)

and clarity flows, (there) with the full team of vehicles come to the Pilgrim-sacrifice, yes, Indra also, come to the Pilgrim-sacrifice.[1]

The human system is beset with elements of sloth, inertia and negation. These spring from the very nature of the material body in which the living mental organism is encased: in its very strength of solidity and immobility lie the seeds of all forces of opposition to movement, unwillingness to change and progress: the hold of *tamas* and inconscience which thwarts every attempt to advance is a fact of inescapable dismay to the spiritual seeker. The Rishi calls upon Vayu, the God of the dynamic Force of Life, and Indra, the God of the pure Mind, to ignore these elements that refuse to be active and participate in the inner Yajna, and to force their way into the house of his Being, where the onward Yajna—moving single-mindedly like the pilgrim to the goal—is in progress. Only so, only by their dynamic presence within will the slumberers be awakened to the urge of the soul. And the house is already echoing the voice of the *grāvā*, the Word-Power of Indra which is processing the system for its yield of ecstasy, the Stone which releases *juices* that pervade all the activities of the Yajamana and lead him on the path of Felicity even as they opened the vistas to Manu on the ancient day.[1] The advent of these Divine Hosts is an event of capital importance. For when the Light of the highest regions of the purified mind is joined to the Powers of the original life-force, then is the indispensable condition fulfilled for a divine manifestation in all its glory in the person of the seeker. The flashes of Truth seen so long in glimmerings glide into a spreading Dawn of the Sun of Truth; the soul is greeted by an auspicious and happy Infant Splendour heralding, as it were, the rise of the fuller Orb. There outflows in the being, on all its levels, a clarity which imparts a clearness of vision, a directness of path and a consequent self-ordered harmony to all the movements of the mind, the senses, the life-force. It is to shower these divine gifts, to inaugurate their new career that the Gods—Indra and Vayu—are invoked to come down with all their retinue of vehicles. For the vehicles of the gods, their horses and their carriages have also a significant part in carrying succour to the human world, in fighting the enemy on the battlefield.

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[1] अति वायो ससतो याहि शश्वतो यत्र ग्रावा वदति
तत्र गच्छतं गृहमिन्द्रश्च गच्छतम् ।
विसूनृता ददृशे रीयते घृतमा पूर्णया नियुता
याथो अध्वरमिन्द्रश्च याथो अध्वरम् ।। (I. 135. 7)

When the human system has been sufficiently subjected to the higher pressure and has attained a certain measure of responsive plasticity and ripeness it is time for the Soma juices to be helped out. This is done in the external rite by means of the fingers as the ritualists emphasise, and in the inner context by the subtle thought-powers, called variously—rays, sisters, brides etc.—

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[1] यथा पुरा मनवे गातुमश्रेत् । (RV. X. 76. 3)

belonging to the ranges of the pure and luminous mind.

Come, O Indra, with thy rich lustres, these Soma juices desire thee; they are purified by the subtle powers and by extensions in body.[1]

The Rishi invokes Indra to come in his full glory, with his many-hued powers which have each their own benefactory contribution to make for the success of the Yajna in progress. The Juices of delight await the advent of Indra. They have been purified and are in a condition to be acceptable to him. The flow of delight is first mixed up with the currents of life-energies in man and decreases or increases with the ebb and flow of the forces of *prāṇa*. It is to be disengaged from this dependence and purified before it can flow by its own right on the levels of the luminous mind, before it acquires a form acceptable to Indra, the God of the Pure and Luminous Mind. And this has been done, says the Rishi, by *anvībhiḥ* and by *tanā*, by the subtle powers and by spreading in the body. The juices have extended themselves wide into the awakened physical consciousness and partaken of vibrant aspiration pervading and possessing the body. They have been taken up by the subtle powers of Thought which in imparting to them their own character of light and purity of consciousness have purged the *rajasic* elements characteristic of the life-principle in the material body and enabled them to enter into the domain of Indra for his delectation. "He (the Rishi) proceeds from the vital or nervous action to the mental, he invokes...the might of Indra. The outpourings of the wine of delight desire him, *sutā ime tvāyavaḥ*; they desire the luminous mind to take possession of them for its activities; they are purified, *anvībhis tanā*, 'by fingers and the body' as Sayana explains it, by the subtle thought-powers of the pure mind and by extension in the physical consciousness as it seems to me to mean." (Sri Aurobindo)

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[1] इन्द्रा याहि चित्रभानो सुता इमे त्वायवः ।
अण्वीभिस्तना पूतासः ॥ (I. 3. 4) Tr. by Sri Aurobindo.

The mighty inviolate Gods taste the Soma, and at his abode chant like Seers eager like falcons. The Wise ones impel him with ten fingers (*subtle powers*) *and anoint the form with the essence of the Waters.*[1]

The Gods are self-sufficient in their might; they suffer no want and this their fullness renders them impregnable to the sons of Darkness that tempt with their bait of Desire. Still, Soma is their nectarous food and of Soma they are fond. They taste it and with every taste they grow eager for more; they gather at the fount of Soma, wherever it is, and wait earnestly and expectantly. Like the Rishis who chant with a heart-throbbing eagerness for the divine response, the Gods not merely wait for

[1] इन्दुं रिहन्ति महिषा अदब्धाः पेदे रेभन्ति कवयो न गृध्राः ।
हिन्वन्ति धीरा दशभिः क्षिपाभिः समञ्जते रूपमपां रसेन ॥
(IX. 97. 57)

but hasten the expression of Soma by their vocal vibrations. The wise ones, the seers with knowledge, welcome the Guests and impel the Soma juices by means of the ten fingers. The *fingers* are Rays of Light, fingers —if fingers they must be—of *Suryā*, the daughter of the Sun-God. It is these Rays—the streams or powers of illumination, of the Higher Knowledge-Mind that go to purify, strengthen and impel the Soma Juices on the lower levels to flow upwards. Why ten rays, it may be asked. The number ten and its multiples like hundred, thousand, are used in the parlance of the Vedic tongue and even in the language of the Epics like the Mahabharata, to express a wholeness, a completeness; ten rays would indicate a full multitude of powers. And the Soma yield thus expressed is rendered, by the seers, fragrant with the very essence of the Waters—the cream of the streams of conscious energy with which their purified being is filled.

Giver of plenty to the givers, divine showerer of bounties, of happy wisdom, Soma glows in clarity, himself the truth to the Truth. The King upholds effective strength, is best borne by the ten rays (reins) of subtle powers.[1]

To those who give, who offer themselves with the best in them Soma brings plenty; the niggardly, the calculating misers, the traffickers, *paṇis*, do not engage themselves in this *yajna* of self-offering. Not for them are the felicities of Soma. The gifts that flow in the trail of Soma are the riches of the spirit making for a godly existence. This Ananda is suffused with an auspicious knowledge. As one ascends the larger heights of the being, the real nature of Delight and Knowledge as the inalienable twin aspect of the same Self-Existence becomes evident and a fact of experience. This clear-flowing Soma, says the seer, is the Truth itself flowing for the Truth, *ṛtam ṛtāya pavate*, a memorable phrase summing up in itself a whole philosophy of Creation. Soma, the ecstasy of delight, is the truth that upholds and around which moves the entire creation. And this stream of Ecstasy holding in itself the utmost that creation can yield, flows to the ocean of the Supreme Truth above, *ṛtāya satyabhutāya indrāya*, says Sayana. Creation has been released into manifestation by the Truth-Being as an expression of its self-existent delight. Delight is its root, its truth, *ṛtam*, and to yield a richer and varied delight to the Parent-Being, its sole purpose, *ṛtāva pavate.* Again it is this Ananda that is at the basis of all strength ultimately effective in the universe. All true strength derives its character from this substratum of delight—Soma. And such kingly Soma, concludes, the Rik, is borne to excellent purpose by the ten rays or ten reins, which are, as we have explained, the subtle powers of Thought in their plenitude, the Powers that uplift, purify and energise with their consciousness the streams of Soma that are coursing in the passage of Life.

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[1] प्र दानुदो दिव्यो दानुपिन्व ऋतमृताय पवते सुमेधाः ।
धर्मा भुवद् वृजन्यस्य राजा प्र रश्मिभिर्दशभिर्भारि भूम ॥ (IX. 97. 23)

O Soma, the ten women greet thee, as a maiden her lover; Soma, thou art cleansed and refined to win (the riches).[1]

Here again it is the subtle powers in their full complement that receive the juice of Soma. He is taken up with ardour and given a purificatory cleansing, a culturing so to say, that equips him to enter the still higher domains and win for the Yajamana the glorious riches of the Spirit.

Him, the ten self-moving sisters (the subtle powers) seize firmly and hold in the ultimate heaven endowed with Might (mighty men).[2]

The sisters, the subtle thought-powers, that seize the Soma are self-moving, *svayam saranti svasārah̤*; they are moved by the truth within themselves for self-effectuation and need no external impulse or aid. These powers, in full numbers, hold the Soma yet turbulent and unsteady, coming as he does from the intricate nook and corner of the impetuous life-force; they purify it, steady it, render it fit to pass to the purer regions of the heaven above; there amidst the summits of the Pure Mind where mighty vastnesses are extended, it is again these Powers that shape it into a form and individuality that hold it firm.

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[1] अभि त्वा योषणो दश जारं न कन्यानूषत ।
मृज्यसे सोम सातये ।। (IX. 56. 3)

[2] तमीमण्वीः समर्य आ गृभ्णन्ति योषणो दश ।
स्वसारः पार्यें दिवि ।। (IX. 1. 7)

This valiant Soma with swift-moving cars goes impelled by the subtle thought-power, to the well-accomplished place of Indra.[1]

A truly remarkable Rik for the total absence of the deliberate ambiguity in which the Rishis are wont to clothe their soul-thoughts. Here the seer declares openly that the Soma is impelled by the subtle thought-power, *anvyā dhiyā*. Equipped and impelled by these thought-powers, Soma acquires the title to be sped to his destination by the swiftnesses, the rapid moving forces native to the higher ranges of the Mind. Thus carried, Soma whose long journey—journey across *crookednesses*[2]—has been one of continuous struggle and endurance against the thousand forces that ever threaten to bar the way and throttle it out of existence—the valiant Soma, goes forth to the Home of Indra ready for his reception, the Station of the Pure Mind where the streams of illumined ecstasy deliver themselves into fulfilment.

The Juices thus expressed are received in the Soma rite in platters, two shallow dishes made of wood, one to hold and the other to cover, *adhiṣavana-phalakau*. Here too the material implements are symbols of veiled truths. The Brahmanas themselves recognise the symbolic character of the platters. The Shatapatha Brahmana, for

[1] एष धिया यात्यण्व्या शूरो रथेभिराशुभिः ।
गच्छन्निन्द्रस्य निष्कृतम् ॥ (IX. 15. 1)

[2] असृग्रम् . . . .अतिह्वरांसि (IX. 63. 4)

instance, has no hesitation in unequivocally stating that these two platters are the Earth and the Heaven, etc. *phalake...dyāvā-pṛthivī* (III. 9. 4. 18). True, their system of symbolism does not correspond closely to that of the Rig Veda as maintained in this interpretation; what is important is that the knowledge of symbolic significance of the ritual was there, preserved even in the vedic texts such as the Brahmanas which are avowedly ritualistic.

To the Vedic mystics, as pointed out earlier, the earth or anything born of earth stood for the physical principle in creation. And wood, a product of the tree coming out of earth, signifies the physical matter. The two platters made of wood represent the two entities of the Mind and the Life embedded in the physical frame of the human body. Mind and Life with their governing principles of Knowledge and Action are engaged in the physical body of man in deriving and holding the sap of all experience for the intaking of the Soul. "In fact it is the twin aspect of Knowledge and Action, mind and life in mutual accord and proper adjustment that makes it possible to receive and preserve the extracted rasa which is their common aim and true function."[1]

From the Platters, the Soma flows into the strainer, the purifier, *pavitra*.

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[1] Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry: *Further Lights: The Veda and the Tantra* (pp. 129-130).

Of ancient birth, this God, extracted for the Gods, flows bright (twany) to the strainer.[1]

The principle of Delight, the substantial element of Ecstasy is as old as creation —of ancient birth. Only in each it has to be brought out of the obscure layers of the being, extracted, for offering to the Gods. It is bright, *hari*, (it is twany as a plant) and fresh when it is thus distilled; still it needs to be purified through the *pavitra*. And what it this pavitra that is described in the Riks, what is it made of?

He purifies (or decks) himself through the subtle powers of the winkless sight (sheep's fine wool) like a war-horse.
He, Soma, flowing clear is the joy of all, (hymned) by men of understanding, by the Wise, the sages of the Riks.[2]

The flowing juice is strained through *anvāni meṣyaḥ*, which in the external rite are the fine wool of the sheep through which the liquid is filtered. But in the inner setting, the strainer, *pavitra*, has a significance which strikes with a happy naturalness when we take the root *miṣ* in the sense of *being winkless*; *meṣa* means *nitya unmeṣa*, ceaselessly open, winkless seeing.[3] It is the subtle

[1] एष प्रत्नेन जन्मना देवो देवेभ्यः सुतः।
हरिः पवित्र अर्षति ॥ (IX. 3. 9)

[2] स मामृजे तिरो अण्वानि मेष्यो मीळ्हे सप्तिर्न वाजयुः।
अनुमाद्यः पवमानो मनीषिभिः सोमो विप्रेभिर्ऋक्वभिः ॥ (IX. 107. 11)

[3] Commenting on I. 51. 1 (RV.), Sri Kapali Sastry writes:
मेषम्, नित्योन्मेषं अविच्छिन्नजागरणं, इन्द्रं . . . . .मिष स्पर्द्धा-

powers of the winkless sight, the strainers of an ever-awake receiving consciousness formulated in the inner eye that filter the inflowings of the essence of all experiences gained through sense-contacts and other modes of contact, and sifting the sediment of the grosser and lower layers allow only the purified distilled *rasa* to pour into the holding vessel. Purified by these powers of vigilance, Soma emerges bright and polished like a steed of war harnessed for action; the flowings of such a Soma says the seer, are sights of joy, objects of hymnal tribute by men who *know*, by them who are wise, by the Seers of the Riks. Why only by those who are wise and sages? If Soma were to mean only the Plant, this line would be otiose if not simple gibberish. The properties of the fermented plant-juice do not call for any special wisdom or knowledge on the part of its votaries for appreciation of its worth. It is more often the other way—it is those of the other category that are apt to go delirious with joy and break into chorus at the sight of their bacchic goddess.

यामिति धातोर्निष्पादयति सायणः उन्मीलनार्थात् मिषतेर्निष्पन्न इति वयम् ॥ (*Rig Veda Bhashya*, p. 463)

Also *Vide* I. 116. 16: ऋज्राश्वः ऋजुगमनः प्राणवलोपलक्षणः अश्वः यस्य तम्, तस्य पिता स्तोत्रवाचां वर्षकः "वृषागीः" अन्धं दृष्टिवियुक्तं कृतवान्। कुतः ? "वृक्यै" छेदकासुरशक्त्यै बहून् "मेषान्" उन्मिषन्ति दृष्टिवलानि दत्तवानिति हेतोः। ऋज्राश्वस्य दृष्टिबलानि आच्छिद्य आसुरशक्तिर्भुक्तवतीत्यर्थः। तत्र अश्विनोरनुग्रहस्य दृष्टिं समपीपदत् ॥ (Ibid. p. 832)

O Soma, when thou art cleansed, currents of ecstatic Delight that flow quick collected, move swiftly over the subtle powers of winkless Eye. Soma, when thou art well anointed with the yield of the luminous Rays within the material body, thou droppest down, when pressed out, into the Jars.[1]

As the streams of Soma, the currents of ecstasy, are purified and relieved of the denseness inevitable on the lower plains of life, they gather momentum and pass swiftly through the close structured network of the powers of the ceaseless vigilance and enter the regions of the higher Mind. They are exposed to and get charged with the Rays (*go* means ray as well as cow and to the Vedic mystics it signified the Ray of Illumination, of Knowledge.) And thus treated with the light of illumined consciousness, that is acquired and treasured in the Bowl of the physical body as its actuating dynamis, the juices of Ananda flow into the several jars of the inner and subtle bodies. We shall revert to the Bowl and the Jars at the close.

The Soma strainer is spread in the seat of heaven, its threads are luminous, remain pervasive and many. Him who purifies him (this Soma) the swift moving currents protect (or increase). They by their consciousness stand over the Heaven's surface.[2]

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[1] प्र ते धारा अत्यण्वानि मेष्यः पुनानस्य संयतो यन्ति रंहयः ।
यद् गोभिरिन्दो चम्वोः समज्यस आ सुवानः सोम कलशेषु सीदसि ॥
(IX. 86. 47)

[2] तपोष्पवित्रं विततं दिवस्पदे शोचन्तो अस्य तन्तवो व्यस्थिरन् ।
अवन्त्यस्य पवितारमाशवो दिवस्पृष्ठमधि तिष्ठन्ति चेतसा ॥ (IX.83.2)

The Soma is here called *tapuḥ*, scorcher, for indeed the forces of misery and evil are burnt out of existence with the birth of Soma. Pain and unhappiness are but perverse conditions and are naturally displaced and eliminated by the active presence of the original and pure state of delight and ecstasy. The purifying strainer is spread high in the heaven of the Pure Mind—above the lower levels of the sense-ridden or desire-dominated mind. The strands of this Purifier, its vibrations of pure consciousness, its extensions of activity, whether cognitive or emotive, are enlightened, partake of the illumined nature of the higher altitudes of the being; they are not confined to a limited part, but they are *vyasthiran*, spread out in a pervasive, manifold manner overhanging larger and larger phases of the being, exerting their gentle pressure on them to respond to their light.

Thus purified, the streams of Soma attain a mobility and fine strength of power which enable them to course freely in the being of the Yajamana and promote his growth in their own nature. On acquring this high degree of the pure mental consciousness, the currents of Soma find it natural to have their own home on the wide surfaces of the Heaven of Pure Mind.

Thus starting from one end of the being, Soma delivers himself in the top-most reaches at the other. Soma cleanses, in his purified movement, the two ends of the Consciousness in man—the Earth of the lower physical consciousness and the Heaven of the higher mental consciousness—makes the world of Heaven and of Earth happy dwelling place for him, *kridhi sushthāne rodasi punānaḥ* (RV. IX. 97. 27).

The rest of the symbolism in the Rite does not need much elaboration. It gets clear in the light of the elucidation we have presented so far. The Soma Juices pour into and are held in the Bowl which is doubtless the human body. This container called *kalaśa* is the body of the Yajamana which has undergone a thorough process of inner purification and has been trained to respond to and house within itself a growing charge of the Higher Consciousness as a result of which it has acquired a natural glow of the godly Light, of a golden case, *kośe hiraṇmaye*. The ox-hide orcow-hide, *gor-adhi twaci*, covering the *kalaśa* is the protective cover of the Ray of Light. The reservoir of the Soma ecstasies is contained in such a well-baked body. The juices are mixed with milk, the yield of the luminous cow, *gavāśira soma*; the streams of *ananda* are exposed to the light of Knowledge on the heights of the Pure Mind. They are mixed with curds, the 'fixation of the yield (of the *cows*) in the intellectual mind', *dadhyāśira soma*: the delights are welcome to the concrete impact of the knowledge active on the ideative or intellectual levels of the mind. They are mixed with corn, *yavāśira soma*, which by its character of material substance deriving from earth signifies the physical mind or more correctly the seed of light in that mind. Thus the three mixtures represent the assimilation by the streams of Delight of the light of Knowledge severally on its triple levels.

The draught of Soma thus prepared is poured into jars, *camasa*. And these Chamasa cups, we are told in the Riks, are fashioned out of one original Bowl.

And this bowl of Twashtṛ new and perfected you made again into four.[1]

The creator endows man with one Bowl, the physical body with the physical consciousness embodied therein. The seeker has, in the course of his discipline, tempered it for the high purpose. The Ribhus, the divine helpers of man in his journey of ascent, shape this bowl fourfold; that is, the four principles that are the constituents of the human existence in their intermingled state and action, are separated, moulded and individuated, each to form a distinct body characteristic of the principle constituting it so that when the wine of delight is ready, it could be offered to the Gods in the maximum number of cups, each with its own flavour,—the *camasas* of the physical body, the vital or life-body, and the still subtler the mental body and finally the causal body. The Delight of Existence is thus derived on each of the four main planes of the being and formulated into their characteristic expressions for a varied and total self-offering to the Gods who are watchful for that momentous hour.

Many of the hymns of the Ninth Mandala addressed to Soma can indeed fit in with the ritual context as the juice of the Soma plant. But there are hymns to other Deities, profound and striking on the very face of them, in other Mandalas, in which Soma is mentioned as a beverage to the Gods and they make no meaning if literally taken in the most gross sense. There is no ambiguity in them; they proclaim the truth in unequivocal terms. We shall illustrate this by citing a Rik of Kutsa Angirasa.

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[1] उत त्यं चमसं नवं त्वष्टुर्देवस्य निष्कृतम् ।
अकर्त चतुरः पुनः ॥ (I. 20. 6)

May this Soma be as much as the whole universe, vast in expanse and profound in depth and be for your beverage and thus sufficient for your soul (lit. mind).[1]

The Rishi is ready with the wine of Soma distilled out of his being after a strenuous *tapasyā*. He is aware that, as it is, it is not yet fit to be the beverage of the mighty Powers—Indra and Agni. They are extended over the entire creation and the offering to be sufficient to them has got to be commensurate with their requirements. The sap of delight confined to his own personal being would be pitifully inadequate. But there is an unmistakable stream of Delight undercurrent in the vast universe around and the Rishi has learnt to develop and enlarge the confines of his own self to embrace this inner ocean of the secret delight so that his offering of Soma is no more limited but one with the universal surge of Ananda. He is just a receptacle in which the streams of

[1] यावदिदं भुवनं विश्वमस्त्युरुव्यचा वरिमता गभीरम् ।
तावाँ अयं पातवे सोमो अस्त्वरमिन्द्राग्नी मनसे युवभ्याम् ॥ (I. 108. 2)

ecstatic rapture gather for the delectation of the Masters of Heaven. The principle of Delight reaches down to the nethermost layers of the Creation—in fact it is the sustaining base—,it is '*profound in depth*', and the Soma offered by the Rishi begins to partake of this character also. Only such an offering could be just and sufficient to the all-pervading Gods, Indra of the Swar and Agni of the Earth. And to that end the Rishi invokes the Divine benediction.

How could the juice of a plant be as vast as the universe? And how could it be deep and profound, *gabhīra*?

This is the true character of the Rite of Soma which has been the subject of popular misconceptions and sophisticated derision at the hands of the Indologist. Possibly, the external rituals and the literal meaning of the Mantras that were used at the sacrifice lent themselves to such a misunderstanding, particularly when the age in which the institution was reared passed far into the dim recesses of the past. Still the symbolism that governed the entire system of rituals and the inner meaning with which the litanies were loaded are facts to which the hymns themselves bear witness and which even the Brahmanas and subsequently, the commentators are forced, in places, to recognise. In our present study we have seen, for instance, how the Soma, is not merely a plant or juice of that plant but in reality the sap of delight in life; it is obtained from the hill, but it is the Hill of Existence rising from its base on Earth to the divine summits above. We have followed the symbolism in the close sequence of the outer ritual and have appreciated the methodical participation of each of the contributory Agents e.g. the Stone, *grāvā*, of Indra—his *Word-Power*, *vāk*, then ten fingers or maidens who are the subtle powers of Thought in their plenitude, the two platters representing the twin principles of Knowledge and Action in the human system, the strainer of sheep's wool signifying the filtering process of the inner eye that is winkless, the *Kalaśa* of the body giving place to the *camasa* of the subtler bodies in which is offered to the Gods the Wine of the variegated ecstasy of life in consummation of a life-long endeavour. We have taken up a number of Riks to aid and illustrate our points in this presentation; instances can be multiplied, in fact the whole of the Ninth Mandala of the Samhita is replete with hymns which, once the right clues are obtained, throw up a staggering host of suggestions and images that evoke admiration and reverence for the extent of practical knowledge and profundity of the life spiritual led by these ancient Mystics of the Rig Veda.

V

LEGEND OF SHUNAH-SHEPA

It is a common notion among the laic and the educated that human sacrifice was prevalent among the Aryans of the Vedic Age as part of their religious Ritual. This belief of common men like many others of the kind is well understandable in view of their notorious lack of historical sense in perspective and an easy tendency to club together all the people beyond a certain historical period as if they all lived at the same time and ascribe the customs and practices of one people to another whatever be the distance in time amongst themselves. We are familiar with the developments that crowded on Indian society during its over-ripe period heading towards decadence. The kernel of the Hindu religion and Dharma was altogether lost to sight amidst the labyrinths that gathered round it as a result of the unfortunate movement of the life and thought of men turned towards the externals of dogma and ritual at the expense of the soul and substance of religious worship. But these features relate only to a particular, ultimate or penultimate period —and it was a long period—of the old Vedic Indian society and to read into them the life and habits of ancestors who must have lived millenniums earlier is an irrationality possible only to the uninformed mass mind.

But the theory that Human Sacrifice was prevalent in the Vedic period is being held seriously by many scholars who have engaged themselves in Indological Research, one of the more notable of whom is the late Dr. Rajendralal Mitra. The whole theory stands, as propagated by them, on a single Sukta in the Rig Veda and its explanation with the help of a legend in the Aitareya Brahmana—the Legend of Shunah-shepa. We shall examine this Hymn and see how far this theory could be supported. Before proceeding with our study it will be helpful to state in sum the position taken up by these Indologists of the last century as represented by Rajendralal. But not all of them hold the conclusions he arrived at. Notably Colebrooke, Wilson and Rosen differ from the rest and hold that the Sukta in question could not be taken as an evidence of the existence of *narabali*—Human Sacrifice—in the age of the Rig Veda.

What they say is this in effect:

In the absence of a factual record of the lives of peoples in the early ages—whether in India or elsewhere—students of history can best form a coherent idea of their beginnings, growth, customs and progress by a comparative study of the different societies in their respective periods of formation. This done, we perceive a thread of uniformity running through the life-history of the various peoples. Humanity has been one in this respect: there is a close correspondence between peoples in identical stages of development whatever their geographical environment. The truth of the remark that

God conceived man in his image and man returned the compliment applies with particular appositeness to the Primitive Man in all the countries. He thought of God in his own terms, but in vastly increased proportions. He was to be propitiated if one sought his favours and, as with man so with God, his benevolence could be purchased by offering what was dearest to the offerer. In the primitive times the 'prime of the flock was the most valued article of possession and sacrifice of animals obtained the highest place in the cultus of ancient worshippers. The owner of the flock was of course the most precious to himself and his children the next after him, and accordingly they would be deemed the most appropriate to be offered as sacrifices; though generally speaking, the main object of worship, in early times, having been the temporal good of the worshipper, it was by no means convenient for him to offer himself as a sacrifice for it. Children, particularly when there happened to be several in a family, could be more readily spared, and they would accordingly be more frequently given for the purpose'. Thus a desire to offer what was most precious to oneself and when that was not possible or feasible a vicarious sacrifice was a universal feature of the early 'evolution of the religious cultus everywhere'. Offering of prisoners of war to the god of Victory prompted partly by 'a vitiated desire for human flesh as a choice article for human food' and partly to please the deity of one's choice is a phenomenon one meets with in many societies during their early periods. The Phoenicians offered human victims to Ba'al and Moloch, the Druids burnt men in wicker baskets; the Thargalia of the Athenians was a national festival where a man and a woman were sacrificed to expiate the sins of the nation. Herodotus refers to the people of Cyprus sacrificing shipwrecked strangers. Anthropethusian rites prevailed in early Egypt. We could go on multiplying instances of this universal characteristic. Even the Aztecs, the most civilised of the American races, indulged in anthropopathy during Coronation and other festivals; so did the Toltecs and the Incas. And there is no special reason to suppose that the ancient Hindus were free from these practices. This supposition is strengthened not merely by a pressing historical evidence as found in societies of the same Indo-Aryan Stock from which the ancient Indians sprang under conditions of identical development; for it is evidenced still more by the persistence of such rites as Sati, Mahaprasthana,[1] Tushanala,[2] the practice of the 'women (especially) of Bengal consigning their firstborn babes to the sacred river Ganges at Sagar island' till lately, facts which show that human immolation was not merely allowed but positively encouraged among the ancient Indians. (Vide *Indo Aryans*, Vol. II, by Dr. Rajendralal Mitra).

Now the last mentioned rite of sacrificing the firstborn bears according to Rajendralal a remarkable resemblance to the rite implied in the legend of Shunah-shepa and that seems to clinch the issue for him. What is the legend as we find it first in the Aitareya Brahmana?

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[1] Drowning oneself to death.

[2] Burning oneself on a blazing fire.

King Harishchandra had no progeny and he prayed to God Varuna for his favour. He vowed to offer him his first-born child if his prayers were answered. A son was born to him and he was named Rohita. But the king was in no hurry to fulfil his promise; Varuna was no less careful to remind the king of his due. However under one pretext or other, the king evaded his obligations until one day Rohita, coming to know the true state of affairs, ran away to the forests. Varuna afflicted the king with dropsy. At last Rohita managed to purchase one Shunah-shepa from a needy father Ajigarta for a hundred cattle and brought him home to be vicariously sacrificed. The poor boy was bound to the stake but was luckily guided by Vishwamitra to pray to Varuna; thereupon Shunah-shepa recited certain hymns of praise to Varuna who was pleased and set him free.

This in brief is the story of Shunah-shepa as it appears in the Aitareya Brahmana (Chap. 33). It appears with ample modifications in the Ramayana (Balakanda, 61-62) and is referred to in the Mahabharata also (Anushasana-parva, Chap. 3). Commentators explain the Shunah-shepa Sukta in the Rig Veda with the help of and in the foreground of this story as found in the Brahmana. And here lies, as pointed out by Sri Kapali Sastry, a cardinal error. For these Brahmanas are posterior in origin to the Rig Veda. They must date at least some centuries later. They seek to explain and enlarge upon the verses in the hymns of the Rig Veda. And we should not forget that the Samhita as it has come down to us is again a collection of hymns which themselves were there much earlier and in fact formed a residue found in the closing era of a period when the Rig Veda was compiled. It is these Mantras that are the seeds as it were of the latter luxuriant growth of Akhyayikas and Akhyanas. The latter in turn provide the nuclii for Puranic stories and legends. To seek to explain Vedic texts with the help of the Puranic episodes quite often is an unnatural reversion of process and that is a trait of medieval commentators. This is not the only instance of its kind. Attempts such as to explain the text of '*Idam Viṣṇur vicakrame*', 'Vishnu traversed this (world)' (RV.I.22.17) with the help of the Puranic story of Vamana Avatara forgetting that this Mantra is at the basis of the whole story are other similar scholastic acrobatics. It is wholly wrong to comment on the Suktas as if we were called upon to substantiate the truth of the Puranic stories. We need not follow the tortuous line the commentators adopt to explain this particular hymn holding it within the four corners of the story in the Brahmana. Let us turn straight to the Sukta and make a study of it ourselves.

The Sukta in question is the first of the seven Suktas hymned by Rishi Shunah-shepa, son of Ajigarta, and is found in the first Mandala of the Rig Veda (Anuvaka VI). It consists of 15 resonant Riks cast in three different metres.

The Devata invoked in the first Rik is traditionally ascribed to *Ka*, Prajapati; in the second Agni, in the next three Savitr and the rest are devoted to Varuna.

Before dealing with the hymn proper it will be helpful for a true understanding of the same if we realise the significance of the name of the Rishi who is the supplicant. For in the Veda, the names, at any rate some important ones—are not mere proper names. Names like Kanva, Kakshivan and Gotama signify something more than what they appear to be on the surface. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: 'Kanva, Kutsa, Atri, Kakshivan, Gotama, Shunah-shepa have become types of certain spiritual victories which tend to be constantly repeated in the experience of humanity.' They denote the particular spiritual realisations which the individual had won and took the name therefor. And what does Shunah-shepa connote? *śunaḥ* denotes Bliss, Joy (*sukhaśabdavāci*) and *śepa* is ray (*raśmi*). Shunah-shepa thus literally means Ray of Bliss. This is only by the way; let us presently turn to the Riks. Here is the English rendering with explanatory notes where necessary.

Rik 1: What God among the Immortals is He whose auspicious name we shall invoke? Who is He that will restore us to the Mighty Aditi that I may behold my Father and my Mother?[1]

Rishi Shunah-shepa finds himself bound by bonds and aspires for release. He wants to be freed and restored to Aditi. Who is Aditi? Sayana explains Aditi as the Earth. However, Prof. Max Muller says that 'Aditi, an ancient God or Goddess, is in reality the earliest name invented to express the Infinite; not the Infinite as the result of a long process of abstract reasoning, but the visible Infinite, the endless expanse beyond the earth, beyond the clouds, beyond the sky'. In fact Aditi is the Mother of the Gods. She is also the Mother, the creatrix of the universe and signifies the Infinite Consciousness out of which and in which the entire creation has issued forth and is sustained. By the use of the word *punaḥ* 'again' is clearly suggested the propriety of the Son of the Infinite (the Rishi himself) being restored, going back to Her of whom he was born. It is only then, in a state of utter freedom from the meshes of the little human life, that he can gaze upon his Father and Mother. For the bonds referred to do not mean ropes and knots of the ordinary kind, but the subtle trappings, the *pāśa*, with which the human being finds himself bound in ignorance to the lower life. And who are the Father and the Mother? They are the Heaven and the Earth. The Heaven stands for the consciousness of the Pure Mind above while Earth denotes the awakened and extended consciousness here in the Physical. Normally men cling to the latter alone with faint glimmerings of derivations of the former at the top of their being. But for a growing soul desirous of release into vaster plenitudes above, an awakening of both these terms of

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[1] कस्य नूनं कतमस्यामृतानां मनामहे चारु देवस्य नाम ।
को नो मह्या अदितये पुनर्दात् पितरं च दृशेयं मातरं च ॥ (I. 24. 1)

consciousness in his being—with a natural harmonious balance between them—is indispensable. A conjoint setting of both of these terms of consciousness in one's own being, the establishment of a natural relation can be hoped for only after one transcends the present limitations and frees himself into the wide arms of Aditi, the Infinite Consciousness in Extension—that is, when one has learnt to identify himself with the larger Consciousness of which his normal consciousness is a segmented bit, when in the words of the Seer-Poet, he is

> 'The island ego joined to its continent'.

Rik 2: Let us invoke the auspicious Name of Agni the first among the Immortals; he shall render us again to Aditi the mighty that I may behold my Father and my Mother.[1]

Why does the Rishi describe Agni as the first among the Gods?

It is a fact of spiritual experience that the first decisive step in the inner life of the seeker is marked by a clear emergence of a flaming force of Aspiration upward. This awakening of the Flame of Aspiration within is described as the birth of Agni in man in the hymns of the Rig Veda. The description is no mere poetry; it is one of the many instances in the Samhita where deep spiritual truths drip out of the transparent symbols. The origin

[1] अग्नेर्वयं प्रथमस्यामृतानां मनामहे चारु देवस्य नाम।
स नो मह्या अदितये पुनर्दात् पितरं च दृशेयं मातरं च॥ (I. 24. 2)

of this Flame is not human; it erupts out of the deepest depths of the being evoked by a keen aspiration and call or awakened by some touch of God or Gods, breaks through all the covering layer after layer imposed by Nature and leads the rest of one's being along the onward path it forges in its growth. It is this birth of Agni within that initiates a process of purification; Agni the first-born clears and prepares the ground and gives the Call for other Gods i.e. for other realisations to follow. He presides over the inner Yajna, *antaryajna*, takes on himself the multiple role of the cleanser, *pāvaka*, summoner, *hotā* and the sacrificer himself, *Yajamāna*. Hence he is the first and the most important God sought for by the seekers. The Rishi won the Knowledge that through the preceptor's precept or the command or the Grace of the Creator, Agni is accessible for the success aspired for.

The next three Riks are addressed to Savitr for riches, for wealth which lie in his hands, *te hastayor dadhe*. Now whether we take this wealth to mean material affluence or the plenitude of the inner riches, *antassampatti*, this request is, as Wilson ever so loyal to Sayana remarks, 'rather irreconcilable with the supposed predicament in which Shunah-shepa stands' viz. mortal danger. Surely nobody would think of praying for wordly riches when his very life is hanging in the balance as described in the story.

Then follow the Riks invoking Varuna.

Rik 6: The soaring birds, O Varuna, approach not thy valorous strength; nor do they attain thy strength of endurance or thy rush of fury. Neither do these waters flowing incessant, nor the speeds of wind affect thy might.[1]

Rik 7: Varuna of hallowed understanding, skill and strength, shining in the baseless firmament, holds aloft a mass of delightful life-giving radiance, the rays of which stream downwards with their base above. May these Rays sink deep and set within us.[2]

Rik 8: The regal Varuna prepares the spacious pathway for the Sun to follow; in the untrodden he prepares for the tread of his feet. And he is also the repeller of whatever afflicts the heart.[3]

Standing high Varuna holds in his hands as the Aditya, Sun-God of Truth-Light, this mass of life-giving and therefore delightful radiance; it is golden in hue and from it proceed rays of illumination, *cinmaya*, earthward towards us the inhabitants of the earth. We aspire to let them enter into us and establish themselves in our innermost chamber of the heart. But the Enemy who is darkness opposing all light afflicts the heart and it is

[1] न हि ते क्षत्रं न सहो न मन्युं वयश्चनामी पतयन्त आपुः ।
नेमा आपो अनिमिषं चरन्तीर्न ये वातस्य प्रमिनन्त्यभ्वम् ॥

[2] अबुध्ने राजा वरुणो वनस्योर्ध्वं स्तूपं ददते पूतदक्षः ।
नीचीनाः स्थुरुपरि बुध्न एषामस्मे अन्तर्निहिताः केतवः स्युः ॥

[3] उरुं हि राजा वरुणश्चकार सूर्याय पन्थामन्वेतवा उ ।
अपदे पादा प्रतिधातवेऽकरुतापवक्ता हृदयाविधश्चित् ॥ (I. 24. 6-8)

only Lord Varuna of pure discernment, *pūtadakśa*, that repels this foe of light opposing the rays of the golden Sun. He prepares an ordered path for the entry of the all-sustaining Sun into the unlit regions of the human and in doing so keeps away whatever is opposed to the Light.

Rik 9: Innumerable are thy healers, O Lord, a hundred, a thousand; may thy gracious thought flow wide and deep towards us. Turn away and remove far from us Nirriti, the Daemon of Sin and Death. Liberate from us even the sin we may have committed.[1]

Nirriti is a universal power, the spirit of Death, the source of all sin and suffering, a force of falsehood; sin, *énas*, is an act by body, mind or speech against the Law of Truth done knowingly or otherwise. Removal of both of them is possible by the Grace of Varuna. He is ever capable of effecting the purification.

Rik 10: Whither do they go by day, these constellations set high above and seen by night? Undeflected are the workings of Varuna and so does the Moon move on resplendent by night.[2]

In this Rik is praised Varuna presiding over the Law of Truth and who not merely brings us our purification but orders the all-sustaining activities in the Cosmos in accord with the Truth. It is due to his overlordship that here in this universe the stars are not seen during the day in the light of the Sun, the moon lights up the night and the stars are held in the heights. Thus all the regulations of the Creator are but the play of the Truth-Light of Aditya as Varuna.

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[1] शतं ते राजन् भिषजः सहस्रमुर्वी गभीरा सुमतिष्टे अस्तु।
बाधस्व दूरे निर्ऋतिं पराचैः कृतं चिदेनः प्र मुमुग्ध्यस्मत् ॥

[2] अमी य ऋक्षा निहितास उच्चा नक्तं ददृश्रे कुह चिद्दिवेयुः।
अदब्धानि वरुणस्य व्रतानि विचाकशच्चन्द्रमा नक्तमेति ॥ (I. 24. 9-10)

Rik 11: Widely lauded Varuna, I ask of thee, with prayer adoring, that Supreme which is craved for by the worshipper with his offerings. Undisdainful, pray, do not let our life-span be robbed.[1]

Wasting away one's life is tantamount to letting its being stolen away; a life consecrated to God is not robbed but well-protected, it fulfils itself.

Rik 12: That itself becomes the Night; that becomes the Day as well; this they tell me. This too the Knowledge of the heart doth illumine. May he whom the fettered Shunah-shepa invoked, the Lord Varuna, set us free.[2]

The Rishis have told him so incessantly. But he is not content with what is told by others; there arises within himself a direct perception of the heart, a direct knowledge which confirms the same truth, mark the words *hṛda ā vicaṣṭe*.

[1] तत्त्वा यामि ब्रह्मणा वन्दमानस्तदाशास्ते यजमानो हविर्भिः।
अहेळमानो वरुणेह बोध्युरुशंस मा न आयुः प्र मोषीः॥

[2] तदिन्नक्तं तद्दिवा मह्यमाहुस्तदयं केतो हृद आ विचष्टे।
शुनःशेपो यमह्वद्गृभीतः सो अस्मान् राजा वरुणो मुमोक्तु॥
(I. 24. 11-12)

Rik 13: Held and bound to the tree in three spots, Shunah-shepa invoked the Son of Aditi. And may he, Lord Varuna who knows and is irresistible, deliver him; may he let loose his bonds.[1]

Rik 14: Varuna, we avert thy disregard by homages, sacrifices and offerings. Dwelling in us, O supreme Knower and Powerful One, loosen for us (the bonds of) our sins.[2]

Rik 15: Varuna, pray loosen from us the bond above; loosen the bond below; loosen the bond between; for then shall we, Son of Aditi, live for Aditi faultless in thy service.[3]

These last four Riks along with the first two in the Sukta merit our special attention in as much as on a correct reading and just appreciation of their import depends our acceptance or non-acceptance of the theory of human sacrifice based on this Sukta by Indologists. In the first Rik, as already pointed out the Rishi invokes the help of the Gods in order to be restored to Aditi. Aditi is the Infinite Consciousness, the Creatrix of the universe, the Mother of the Gods who are the Lords of the worlds.

[1] शुन:शेपो ह्यह्वद् गृभीतस्त्रिष्वादित्यं द्रुपदेषु वद्धः ।
अवैनं राजा वरुणः ससृज्याद्विद्वाँ अदब्धो विमुमोक्तु पाशान् ॥

[2] अव ते हेळो वरुण नमोभिरव यज्ञेभिरीमहे हविर्भिः ।
क्षयन्नस्मभ्यमसुर प्रचेता राजन्नेनांसि शिश्रथः कृतानि ॥

[3] उदुत्तमं वरुण पाशमस्मदवाधमं वि मध्यमं श्रथाय ।
अथा वयमादित्य व्रते तवानागसो अदितये स्याम ॥ (I. 24. 13-15)

It is a Ray, *śepa*, of Delight, *śunah*, issuing from Her that takes birth here on earth as the Jiva embodied in man. And here once awakened he yearns to go back to Her from whom he came—to be restored to Her, the Mother. For that he needs the help of the Gods and he naturally appeals to one nearest to him, Agni who is the first-born in Man as explained in the second Rik. But the Jiva, the Shunah-shepa finds himself bound to a Tree to which he is triply fastened. Grown out of the earth, *Bhū-ruha*, the Tree stands for the entire living physical substance known by the term Matter, *anna*. Out of it come forth, in the course of evolution, subtle means and instruments of Action and Knowledge. And based upon the truth of these principles, classifications in creation are made, triple, fourfold, fivefold etc. But usually the triple classification is resorted to because it is easy of grasp and evident in ordinary life. We have known it as the division of matter, life and mind, *anna*, *prāṇa* and *manas*. These indeed comprise the Tree with three places, *dru-pada* mentioned in the Rik. To these three, body, life and mind the Jiva which is the embodied Ray of Bliss is tied and bound. It is from this triple bondage that the Rishi prays to Varuna for release. The bond above refers to the bonds that tie the being to the mental roof, the bond below to the moorings in the Inconscient, *jada*, matter, and the bond between obviously stands for the grip of the vital, *prāṇa*, on him. It is only the intervention of the Gods, the Grace of Varuna that can effect the desired release. The bonds do not certainly mean the ligatures fastening the head, the waist and the feet as explained by Sayana. For if they do, what is the significance of the line that follows immediately as a consequence—*anāgasaḥ syāma* —faultless, sinless shall we become? How can a physical release from a post make a man faultless, sinless? The inference is clear. The release, the liberation from bonds is the symbol, proto-type of the Release from all Knots described in the Upanishads. The knots are the knots of Ignorance, the bonds of the threefold body, as taught by the Vedantic seers. This triple bondage is well known in the Tantras as the *Granthis* called after Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. The threefold bondage denotes the presence of obstruction to the entry and opposition to the spread of the Light of Truth in the threefold being of man. It is only after one is liberated from these knots that one gets sinless, gets restored to the Infinite, Aditi the creatrix of All and lives for and in Her. This the Rishi knows. He has been told of it by his preceptors. But more than that, he *knows it by himself*, by a direct knowledge welling out of his heart, *tadayam keto hrida ā vicaṣṭe*. This single line is enough to convince the straightforward intelligence as to what kind of Knowledge the Rishi speaks of and what kind of bondage he seeks release from. A direct Knowledge by heart, a knowledge that proceeds by an inner identity is irrelevant and a mockery in the extreme if one is tied to a sacrifical post and threatened every moment with an uplifted knife.

Still it is legitimate to hold that whatever be the import of the Sukta, it is an inescapable conclusion, from the narration in the Brahmanas, that human sacrifice was prevalent as a sacrificial rite among the Vedic Aryans. But this is a wrong conclusion and it is proper to reject the suggestion on the textual authority of the Aitareya Brahmana itself. For in the course of the narration of the story of Shunah-shepa occurs this sentence the significance of which cannot be missed: "Then Shunah-shepa looked around and said 'Woe! They mean to kill me *as if I were not human* (*amānuṣamiva*). I shall hasten to the Devata."[1] Here we shall quote Sayana's commentary authoritatively condemning killing of human beings: "Elsewhere after the *Pari-agnikaraṇa*[2] they release the Purusha and also the foresters; as the Sruti counsels Ahimsa they let the man go after the *Pari-agnikaraṇa*. But these people desire to kill me, to immolate me like a goat-animal, different from man, as if I were not human." And what does this indicate? Does it not show that immolation of life was confined at the most to animals and did not extend to human beings and the very idea was looked upon with horror as something unnatural and unlawful? If it was a common practice to perform the *narabali* as a Vedic rite why should Shunah-shepa in the story have recoiled in the way he did from what he plainly calls an unnatural proceeding?

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[1] 'अथ ह शुनःशेप ईक्षांचक्रे अमानुषमिव मा विशसिष्यन्ति हन्ताहं देवता उपधावामि।' (ऐ. ब्रा. ३३ अ.)

[2] *Pari-agnikaraṇa* is a particular rite of thrice circling round an object with a lighted Darbha-weed.

Considerable misunderstanding on the subject is due to an erroneous identification of the ceremony of *Puruṣa Medha* with what has come to be known in later times as *narabali*. Of course the nomenclature of the ceremony is to a certain extent responsible for this belief; for *Puruṣa Medha* literally may mean Human Sacrifice. And *Puruṣa Medha* as Yajna did exist in the Vedic society. What was this Rite? and why was it so named?

While there is no mention of this rite in the Rig Veda proper, support for this is to be found in the Yajur-veda, the Adhwaryu Shakha. There is no separate section of Mantras for the *Puruṣa Medha* in the Taittiriya Samhita, but there is a section in the Taittiriya Brahmana (III.4) of the Black Yajurveda. There are also Mantras related to this rite in the Shukla Yajurveda—in Adhyayas 30 and 31 wherein the subject has been dealt with at length. But the main Mantra of the *Puruṣa Medha* is taken from the Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda.

This Yajna was to be performed by a Brahmin or a Kshatriya who desires to attain a supreme position, a status higher and beyond all the rest of the created beings, '*atiṣṭhā-kāma*'. Like other Yajnas, it has its own technique of arrangement and paraphernalia. Suffice it to say that there are mentioned many Gods to whom offerings are to be made. To each God a particular offering is made; they include animals, human beings and even non-material objects viz. 'To Vayu the five vital breaths, *prāna*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, *samāna;*...to Chandrama his mind...' etc. (Taittiriya Brahmana III.4)

All these animals and human beings—there are 48 of these latter—are hallowed with the utterance of the Mantras, sectioned off into different groups according to their birth or profession and tied to the sacrificial posts as per rites. Then what does the Yajamana do? Sitting on their right he lauds them as the Hota and in the order of the Mantras sprinkles water over them. *Pari-agnikaraṇa* of the human beings follows and thereafter each is consigned to the respective Devata for whom he is intended e.g. the Brahmin is offered to the Brahman, 'this for Brahman', the Kshatriya, 'this for Kshatra' and so on. At the conclusion all the human beings beginning with the Brahmin are released from their posts and set free. (*Vide* Mahidhara Bhashya on Shukla Yajurveda, Chap. 30.)

The conception underlying this Yajna was something stupendous possible only for the Sages of the Vedic times who had a cosmic outlook in vision, thought and action. They felt and looked upon the entire creation as a manifestation, indeed an Embodiment of the Supreme Purusha who is One and Eternal.[1] It is Himself, His body that has become and is the universe. It is His personal manifestations that are ensouled in the various types of the human personality. When the sacrificer chooses a particular human being for the Purusha Medha rite, he selects him as a limb of the Viratpurusha, a typical representative of the particular human group. The Purusha, Virat, is one endowed with limbs as it were, *avayavi*; His limbs, *avayava* are the human beings representing the quality, thought, activity and general attitude of the group which itself is a reflected reproduction of the Universal Powers in the Cosmic Manifestation of the Purusha. And it is to Him that the Yajamana offers, renders back what truly belongs to Him, his full entire being.

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[1] This is not our interpretation. Even Sayana and earlier commentators like Uvvata have spoken in unmistakable terms about the significance of the Purusha Medha. And what we state in this respect is based upon the annotations of Mahidhara and Uvvata (Shukla Yajurveda, Chpa. 31) on the Purusha Medha mantras in question.

We need not enter into a discussion of the significance of the number 48. Possibly, with the importance the Vedic Sages attached to the number *seven* as representing a truth of the Cosmic principles frequently met with in Creation,it is but legitimate to suppose that sevenfold seven comes to 49 and this number without the Yajamana who offers his own being to the Universal Power is indeed 48. For the Yajamana is to be left out, for he is the worshipper, the offerer, who worships and offers his being to the deities, to the Universal Powers that are the source, substance and support of his individual existence.

There is then no valid reason for supposing that human sacrifice as an institution existed in the Aryan society of the Vedic Age. For as has been pointed out, human sacrifice, *narabali*, is not the same as Purusha Medha. Nor is it our purpose to argue the question whether the ancestors of the modern Hindus, whoever they be, were an exception to the universal tendency for anthropopathy in primitive societies though such exceptions are not impossible—the ancient Persians are there to argue; indeed, they are known to have not indulged in human sacrifice. It is quite possible immolation of a human being, *narabali*, was there in bygone ages in the corners of the globe as it is even now among some tribes. But this is not to say that Purusha Medha of the Vedic Aryans was by any stretch of imagination the human sacrifice of the barbaric tribes. That this is so even according to the ritualistic codes of the Vedic worship is clear beyond question from the relevant facts to which we have drawn the reader's attention in this short study. And this position remarkably agrees with the inner and true meaning of the Hymns of the Rig Veda as shown in the line of interpretation adopted by Sri Aurobindo.

VI

THE UPANISHADS: NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

JANASHRUTI PAUTRAYANA was a giver and a free giver with belief. Lavish host that he was, he built houses of rest and food everywhere wishing that people everywhere should partake of his food.

One night while some flamingoes (Hamsas) were flying past his abode, one bird said to the other: "Ho! Bhallaksha (shortsighted one), Bhallaksha, the lustre of Janashruti's glory is spread out in the skies; touch it not lest you be consumed."

The other replied: "Kamvara (low wretch)! How can you speak of him, such as he is, as if he were Raikva of the cart?"

The first asked: "And how is this Raikva of the cart of whom you speak?"

The other answered: "Just as in dice, all the lower casts go to him who has cast the *Kṛta* (the highest with four), similarly all the good that men do belongs to Raikva of the cart. And he who knows what he (Raikva) doth know, is thus spoken of by me."

Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa heard this talk and as soon as he woke up the next morning, he asked his janitor: "Why is it so? Why do you speak of me as if I were Raikva of the cart?"

He replied: "But, master, how is this Raikva of the cart?"

The master said: "Just as in dice, all the lower casts go to him who has cast the *Kṛta* (the highest with four), similarly all the good that men do belongs to Raikva of the cart. And he who knows what he (Raikva) doth know, is thus spoken of by me."

The door-keeper went looking for Raikva of the cart. He returned saying, "I saw him not."

To him the master said: "Holla! search for him there where a *Brahma-jñānin*, knower of Brahman (Brahmana) is to be looked for."

The servant then came upon a man lying beneath his cart and scratching his sores. He respectfully approached him and asked: "Sire, are you Raikva of the cart?"

He replied: "Hm. That I am."

Then the janitor came back and reported: "I have found him." Thereupon Janashruti Pautrayana set out with cows, six hundred in number, a necklace and a carriage with mules and greeting him, said: "Oh, Raikva, here are cows in six hundreds, here is a necklace and a carriage with mules; the Deity which you worship, that deign to teach me."

The other answered: "Fie, Oh Shudra, the necklace, the carriage along with the cows stay thine."

And it was not before further entreaties were made, we are told in the Upanishad,[1] that Raikva of the cart consented to impart his wisdom to Janashruti the royal donor. This narrative, like many others of the kind in these texts, throws revealing lights on the society of those ancient times when Knowledge was so much prized that even a king would seek the feet of a cartman for instruction and the poorest was privileged to scorn a prince as a Shudra for daring to ask knowledge for a price. What is the Knowledge that was sought after by these men with such ardour and what precisely is the nature and content of the texts that record and proclaim the strivings and the results of the endeavours of these high-souled leaders of that age in India which came long after the close of the Rig Vedic period? It is necessary to determine the character of these texts, Upanishads as they are known, for while there is a fair degree of unanimity of opinion among indigenous commentators and scholars that the Upanishads preserve the essentials of the Vedic Wisdom and revere the Vedic tradition, Western scholarship generally is prone to regard them more as revolts, apostasies from the Vedic tradition, sharp and intrepid reactions of the intellect against the excesses of the childish imaginative mind of the early Aryan. Modern Indian scholars have tended to follow suit. Witness, for instance, the following observations by one of the foremost of them. In the Upanishads, he says, there is 'a protest against the externalism of the Vedic practices and an indifference to the sacredness of the Veda.' Or again, 'The attitude of the Upanishads is not favourable to the sacredness of the Vedas. Like the rationalistic thinkers of a later day, they adopt a double attitude towards Vedic authority.' And he goes on to say that while in places they concede the scriptural origin of the Veda, 'it is also recognised that the Vedic knowledge is much inferior to the true divine insight.'[1]

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[1] Chhandogya, IV. 3.

There are no two opinions on the greatness of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are great in every way, but not for reasons given by the modern scholar. When Western scholars came upon these texts in the early years of the 19th century, they found in these 'philosophical speculations' or 'guesses at truth' something akin to their own temperament and mode of thought, some lines of thought-movement which reminded them of those of their own early Greek and other philosophers, a meeting ground which they totally missed in the mystic and symbolic—and therefore to them Sealed-Book of the Vedas, and naturally extolled them as, by and large, the finest products of Indian thinking. Translations in continental languages drew a larger number of minds to the texts. Some of the master-minds in the field of European Philosophy spoke in superlative terms, each impressed with different aspects of them, and thus the Upanishads were launched on the crest of this new wave of popularity. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher who named his favourite poodle as Atma,—as a token we suppose, of his recognition of the truth enunciated in the Upanishad that the Atman is present in all creatures,—Oldenberg, Max Muller, Deussen, all these savants contributed not a little to this movement of reclamation of the Upanishads which were proclaimed as 'the basis of the enlightened faith of India' (Goldstucker), as 'if not the most scientific, yet still the most intimate and immediate light upon the last secret of existence' (Deussen). And as in many other spheres, this cry was faithfully echoed by the revivalist movements like the Brahmo Samaj and other Circles captivated by the spell of the West and the Upanishads came to be accepted and esteemed by the average English educated mind of India also, as intellectual speculations of a rare kind marking the high note of Indian spirit in its revolt against the whole mass of Vedic literature and its tradition of worship and ritual. Are the Upanishads great because they mark the zenith of a movement which cut away from the ancient moorings in the Vedic lore or are they great because they continue and enlarge upon truths along with the mystic tradition initiated in the Vedas? That is a question we have to meet and answer for a correct evaluation of these texts of scriptural importance.

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[1] Dr. S. Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy* (Ind. Edn. 1941) p. 144 and 149.

II

The Upanishads are known as the *Veda-anta*, the close, the conclusion of the Vedas. They are the last word, the crown and summit of the Vedas. And any attempt at a study of the Upanishads must naturally proceed with a just and true understanding of the nature and import of the Vedas in as much as the Upanishads purport to present the conclusions, the secret truth and essentials of the main body of the latter—like oil in the sesamum they lie latent, set firm in the Vedas.[1] The meaning and significance of the Veda proper or the relative importance of each of its constituent parts has not been a matter of agreement. There have been and continue to be strong divergences on the subject. The Vedas, as is well known, consist of: (1) Mantras, hymns of the *seers*, Rishis, as recorded in the *Samhitas*, collections, (2) Brahmanas, prose treatises dealing largely with the background, the technique and the issue of the rituals enjoined by them, (3) the Aranyakas which are the penultimate portions of the Brahmanas dealing in a general way with philosophical questions arising out of discussion on rituals and finally, (4) the Upanishads where we find high philosophical thought side by side with records of deep spiritual experience. These important texts are part of the Aranyakas themselves.

Now, orthodox Vedists, the Mimamsakas as they have come to be known, laud the Veda consisting of the Mantra and the Brahmanas as the one sure means for achieving the goal of life, to attain all that is desirable and to ward off all that is unwelcome and harmful.[2] In the

[1] तिलेषु तैलवत् वेदे वेदान्तः सुप्रतिष्ठितः। (Muktikopanishad)

[2] इष्ट-प्राप्ति-अनिष्टपरिहारयोः अलौकिकं उपायं यो वेदयति स वेदः। Sayana: Taittir. Samhita Bhashya.

Veda is revealed the Dharma, the Law of life which is in the form of injunctions. A faithful observance of such a Dharma achieves the ends of life and works out the good of man here on earth in this life and elsewhere beyond, after death. Adherence to this Dharma implies a scrupulous performance of all the rituals sanctioned and enjoined by the Vedic authority. Thus, it is *Karma* (ritual) that is the meaning and purpose of the Veda and it is the Brahmanas that are of paramount importance. For it is in these texts that the principles, the rationale and minutiae of the ritual are laid down in full detail and discussed threadbare. The Brahmanas are, so to say, the handbook of every one who professes the Vedic religion and desires to work out his weal with this unfailing means. Mantras have their use, undoubtedly, but theirs is a secondary role. They are meant to be recited and used as directed during the rituals; they subserve the Karma, *karma-anga*. As for the Upanishads, they are after all the ultimate portions of the Aranyakas or are themselves part of the Brahmanas. They are the supplement, the residue of the Commands which are the ceremonial rites to be observed, *vidhi-śeṣa*. They are in the nature of appendices to the Brahmanas and do not have an independent existence as such.

But this position of the Mimamsakas, systematised and erected into a self-sufficient creed by Jaimini in his Mimansa-Sutras and carried on by his followers as *the* Vedic religion, is not accepted by all. There are others who while conceding support in the Veda for Rituals maintain that the Veda provides equal support for Knowledge. The Veda, they hold, consists of two sections, two *kāndas*, one of rituals, *Karma-kānda*, and the other of Knowledge, *Jnāna-kānda*. The Karmakanda lays down rituals for reaping fruits of enjoyment in this world and the worlds beyond; the other shows the Knowledge which leads man to the supreme object of life which is not temporal like the fruits of the former, but the highest end possible for him. Thus the Veda establishes Dharma by means of the Brahmanas and the saving Knowledge of Brahman—the Supreme Reality—by the Upanishads which constitute the Jnanakanda. If it was Jaimini who gave definite shape to ritualism as a creed, it was Badarayana who collected, examined, reconciled and systematised the floating mass of intuitive thoughts and *apparent* speculations forming the text of the Jnanakanda, in his famous Vedanta Darshana. The Brahmanas formed the central part of the Veda, Karmakanda, for the ritualists while the Upanishads became the Book of Knowledge, Jnanakanda, for others. This division of the Veda into the Karma and Jnana Kandas, the Brahmanas constituting the former and the Aranyakas and the Upanishads the latter, came to be accepted as almost final in the later religio-philosophical schools of thought that sprang up in the succeeding ages. 'The *mantras*, the hymns of the Veda, Parent of the Brahmanas including the Upanishads, did not receive the attention of any one, separately as a body of original sacred texts; they became settled into oblivion as a living scripture.'[1]

And yet, we cannot forget that the original fount from which flowed all this heterogeneous mass of literature, is the *Mantras*. The Brahmanas were more or less exegetical developments with stress on the ceremonial aspect of the Vedic Religion of worship and sacrifice i.e. on its externals, while the Upanishads were a development and enlargement on some of the esoteric aspects. We must remember that the Mantras are not poetical compositions or liturgical verses composed mainly for serving the performance of rituals. The Mantras are the *seeings*, *dṛṣṭayaḥ* of sages and the *seers*, *mantradraṣṭāraḥ*, who in the course of, or in the fruition of their life-long inner *askesis*, *tapaścaryā*, perceived or visioned intimately certain Truths pertaining to the inner regions of life and spirit and found adequate expression to them in words which were vouchsafed to their inspired hearing, *ṣruti*, on the pristine levels of their uplifted being where they came face to face with the Powers of the Higher Reality. Not intellect but something deeper and higher on the purified reaches of their personality was the origin from which the inspired Word broke forth.

The Rishis themselves say in an unmistakable manner that they (or their forefathers) *found*, *discovered* the

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[1] *Lights on the Upanishads* (p. 116-117)

Riks;[1] to them they are god-given;[2] Indra, Lord of the Heavens of the Pure Mind is the promoter of the Kavi, the seer, Indra it is who carries and delivers the Word.[3] Out of the depths of the ocean of Mind they *dug* out the mantras,[4] even as they shaped or *carved* the truth-expressions from within their heart.[5]

These Mantras, the very soul of the Veda, formed naturally an important part of the Vedic Religion, even a preponderating one in the earlier stages of the evolution of the Aryan society. Connected as they were more directly with the inner life of the seekers of the Spirit, the knowledge of their effective use was naturally confined to a limited number. But the Mantras had their definite use in the religion of the generality of men also—in the religion of ceremonial worship, the external sacrifice. And with the passage of time stress came to be laid on the external aspect of the Vedic religion—a development which culminated in a virtual eclipse of the significance of the Mantras and a thick overgrowth of

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[1] इमां धियं सप्तशीर्ष्णीम् पिता न ऋतप्रजातां बृहतीं अविन्दत् ।
(RV. X. 67. 1)
This seven-headed Thought, Vast, born superbly of the Truth, our father discovered.

[2] देवत्तम् ब्रह्म (RV. I. 37. 4) इमां धियं देवीं (RV. III. 18. 3)

[3] स इन्द्रः कविर्वृधः वाकस्य वक्षणिः (RV. VIII. 52. 4)

[4] मनसो वै समुद्रात् . . . .निरखनन्; (Shataphatha Br. VII. 5. 2. 52)

[5] इमं स्वस्मै हृद अ सुतष्टं मन्त्रं वोचेम; (RV. II. 35. 2); हृदा यत्तष्टान् मन्त्रान् (RV. I. 67. 2)

Ritualism. Reaction was inevitable. And we see at the end of the Vedic period, long after the compilations of the Samhitas of Rik, Yajus and Saman, a powerful revivalist movement afoot—a two-sided movement of which the Brahmanas represent one side and the Upanishads the other. The Brahmanas sought to systematise the religion of the Ritualists on a firm basis, to relate it to the Vedic inspiration as far as they could, to revive the older forms of Vedic ceremonial and erect a self-sufficient creed out of them. The Mantras were made use of in so far as they could be stretched to subserve the purpose of Ritual. Side by side there grew up another movement towards the revival and resuscitation of the Knowledge part of what once formed the heart of the Veda—this was represented by the Upanishads. They are a record of the effort of the Vedantic sages to salvage as much as possible of the Truths discovered and lived by the seers of the Vedic age from the shoals and rocks of ritualism and dogma where they had floundered. The Vedantic seers endeavoured to re-live these truths in the way suited to their times; they continued the line of the inner discipline initiated by the Vedic Mystics with necessary variations and went on to enlarge upon and develop it in their own way. Truths which were intuited by the earlier mystics were now sought also to be reached and at least partly realised by means of purified intellect propelled by the force of a flaming aspiration. The comprehensive vision of the All-God of the Vedas was sought to be embraced in successive steps by realising each one of the many facets of the Supreme Brahman. The Upanishads thus are not the result of revolt against the Veda but they 'represent a fragment of the cumulative knowledge of profound truths perceived and lived by the Vedantic seers.' 'If the Brahmanas represent the conservation of the forms, the Upanishads the revelation of the soul of the Veda'.[1] They, the Upanishads, always recognised the parent source of their knowledge in the *mantra-dṛiṣti* of the Vedic Rishis; that to them was the ultimate standard of confirmation. Truths which they visioned, conclusions which they arrived at, as a result of their own independent endeavour, they always tested with the touch-stone of the perceptions of the Master Seers of the Veda. Their adventures in the seas of the spirit always proceeded from a safe anchorage in the vast harbour of the Vedic Rishi.

The Upanishads profess to bring out the truth of the Mantras i.e. the Veda. They quite often quote the Riks as seals of approval for their own findings. So often do we come across in the Upanishads statements such as: 'This is said by the Riks',[2] 'That is said by the Rishi',[3] 'So also says the verse',[4] 'Here are the Mantras',[5] 'Seeing this the Rishi said',[1] etc. Riks of Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and other seers come in for frequent quotation to strengthen and confirm their own perceptions.[2]

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[1] *Lights on the Upanishads* (p. 124)

[2] एतद् ऋचाभ्युक्तम् (Mundaka Upanishad III. 2. 10)

[3] तदुक्तम् ऋषिणा (Aitareya Upanishad IV. 5)

[4] तदेष श्लोकः (Prashna Upanishad I. 10)

[5] अत्र एते मन्त्रा भवन्ति

Sri Kapali Sastry has drawn pointed attention to this feature of the Upanishads and, in discussing the Doctrine of the Mystic Honey, Madhu Vidya (Brihadaranyaka Up.) and the Vaishvanara Vidya,[3] has shown how these Vedantic *Upāsanas* are directly inspired by the Hymns of the Rig Veda. Thus the Upanishads, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, are not "a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret."

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[1] एतदधिविधाय ऋषिः पश्यन् अवोचत् (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, II. 5. 18)

[2] To mention a few:

हंसः शुचिषत् . . . . . (RV. IV. 40. 5), Katha Upanishad II. 5. 2.

अहं मनुरभवं सूर्यश्च . . . . (RV. IV. 26. 1), Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1. 4. 10.

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया . . . . (RV. I. 164. 20), Mundaka Upanishad, III. 1. 1.

There is also the well-known 15th verse of the Isha Upanishad, referring to the Golden lid covering the face of the Truth, which is a reproduction, in an altered language, of the 62nd Hymn from the Fifth Mandala of the Rig Veda. And this fact is brought to light by Sri Aurobindo in his Foreword to the '*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*'.

[3] Vide *Lights in the Upanishads.*

III

There are nearly two-hundred and more of the texts which go under the title of Upanishads. There is even an Allopanishad that is found to be attached to the Atharva Veda! However, only a hundred and eight of them are recognised as eligible to come under this name. Tradition regards twelve or thirteen of these as ancient and principal Upanishads and recognises their authority. The Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka are the ten major Upanishads whose authenticity is unchallenged. The Kaushitaki and the Svetasvatara texts are also recognised as important in view of the reference made to them in the commentaries on the Badarayana Sutras.[1]

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[1] Some of these Upanishads,—mostly the older ones—are in prose and some in verse: the Brihadaranyaka, Chhandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Kaushitaki and Prashana are in prose, the Kena partly in prose and partly in verse, and the Isha, Katha, Mundaka and Svetassvatara in verse.

The Isha Upanishad is the only one which is an integral part of the Veda Samhita; it forms the last chapter of the Shukla YajurvedaSamhita.

The Kena, known by its first word 'Kena' ('by whom') is also called the Talavakara the name of the Brahmana of Samaveda to which the Upanishad belongs.

The Katha or the Kathaka, on the age of which scholars are not all agreed, belongs to the Katha school of the Yajur Veda Samhita. Some maintain, however, that it cannot be definitely said to belong to any of the Veda groups. But this is an error. It is part of the Kathaka section of the Taittiriya Brahmana (XI.8). There is narrated "the story of Nachiketas and the three boons he gets from Yama in

The one preoccupation of all these Upanishads is the *search for Truth*. The seers of these scriptures, the kings, the wise men, the young men (and women) that live in these pages are all afire with thirst for knowledge of the Truth of life, the Truth behind life. No price is too great for the prize and we are told whole lives were spent in pursuit of it. Not merely men, but the gods, the leaders of the gods and the foremost among the demons devoted scores of years for the purpose.[1] Their mode of enquiry was not of the intellectual kind. Sages like Yajnavalkya may seem to the casual reader as if they

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a short section. Except that the Upanishad amplifies it with a special stress on the character of the last boon, the question about man's death and the answer concering the Immortal, the substance is to be found in the Brahmana and to some extent the very expressions." (T.V.Kapali Sastry: Lights on the Upanishads p. 88-89).

The Prashna, Mundaka and the Mandukya belong to the Atharva Veda.

The Taittiriya, as its name indicates, forms part of the Taittiriya Aranyaka of the Krishna Yajurveda.

The Aitareya Upanishad is included in the Aitareya Aranyaka of the Rig Veda; so also the Kaushitaki forms part of the Kaushitaki Brahmana of the same Veda.

The Chhandogya, whose first section is an Aranyaka, belongs to a Brahmana of the Sama Veda.

The Brihadaranyaka forms the concluding portion of the Shata-Patha Brahmana of the Shukla Yajur Veda.

The Svetasvatara Upanishad (as also the Maitrayani, an important text though not included in the earlier collection) is of the Krishna Yajur Veda.

[1] *Vide* narrative of the austerities of Indra and Virochana in the Chhandogya (VIII.I).

were proceeding with the aid of intellect, reason, alone. But that is not so. Reason has a place, an important one too, in their life but the decisive role is given to the inner sight, the deeper perception and experience. The subtler faculties within the being are awakened by arduous discipline, *tapasyā*, and it is with these inner horses yoked to the soul that the pilgrim proceeds to find out the Truth of existence on knowing which all this comes to be known.[1]

Let us state at the outset that to the Upanishadic seers this world in which we live and move is by no means a self-existent and self-sufficient reality; nor is its origin and fundamental nature to be found in Matter which apparently constitutes the very stuff of earth and its creatures. To them creation is an eternal Ashwattha Tree whose roots lie *above* and whose branches course downward.[2] Its Source and Support lie above it. This Supreme Reality, this Truth of truths or 'Real of the real'[3] is termed the Brahman. It is something which they cannot adequately describe; hence it is simply termed TAT, *tad Brahma*. It is beyond the range of speech,[4] it is beyond limitation by Time, *akāla*, it is partless, whole, *akala*. It cannot be comprehended by mental knowledge.[5] It is immovable, *akśara*, not touched by what is manifest. But, say the Upanishads, Brahman is not That alone. The Fundamental Reality is not confined and limited by its freedom from the terms of the Manifest, i.e. by its nature as the Unmanifest. Beyond the Unmanifest is the Supreme Person the Parama Purusha[1] from whom the gods are variously born and of whom Brahma, the first among the Gods, the creator of the worlds as also the protector of the universe[2] is an emanation. From Him issue forth multitudes of forms like sparks from a well-lighted Fire.[3] He is self-existent, self-sufficient. In one of the most beautiful poetic passages of the Upanishads the Supreme Lord and his habitat—if it can be so called—are thus described:

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[1] (यस्मिन्) विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति (Mundaka, I. 3)

[2] ऊर्ध्वमूलोऽवाक्शाख एषोऽश्वत्थः सनातनः (Katha, VI. 1)

[3] सत्यस्य सत्यम् (Brih. II. 20)

[4] यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते (Taittir. II. 9)

[5] अन्यदेव तद् विदितात् (Kena, I. 3)

> There the sun shines not; neither do the moon and the stars; these lightnings shine there not, not to speak of this fire. All but reflects Him that shines; by his radiance is all this radiant.[4]

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[1] अक्षरात् परतः परः; (Mundaka, II. 1. 2). अव्यक्तात् तु परः पुरुषः (Katha, VI. 8)
तस्माच्च देवाः बहुधा सम्प्रसूताः (Mundaka, II. 1. 7)

[2] ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः . . . . .विश्वस्य कर्त्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता (Mundaka, I. 1. 1)

[3] यथा सुदीप्तात् पावकात् विस्फलिंगाः सहस्रशः प्रभवन्ते सरूपाः (Mundaka, II. 1. 1)

[4] न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकम्।
नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः॥
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वम्। तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति॥
(Katha, V. 15; Mundaka, II.2.10)

The Modern mind is apt to get bewildered at these descriptions of what is said to be Indescribable, movements of the Immovable, manifestations of the Unmanifest. But the seers of the Upanishads are not deterred from fearlessly expressing what they directly perceive and there is not even an attempt in these early texts at reconciling the various statements. They saw and recognised that the Reality is many-faceted, many-tiered and can not be shut in any one formula. Each is an expression of the Truth in the particular aspect in which it fronts the seeking eye and there is no questioning of its authenticity. As has been well put, theirs is the 'consistency of intuition rather than of logic.'

The Supreme Reality, however, is not unrelated to the universe. It is from That Brahman that this world is born,[1] like a web from the spider;[2] he is both the efficient as well as the material cause of creation. In the beginning, says the Upanishad, was the Unmanifest; thence appeared the manifest.[3] He desired, 'let me be many' and he did Tapas; and by Tapas, the heat of creative incubation, he created the All. Creating, he entered the all. Entering, he became form and not-form.[4] Thus Brahman is all

[1] अक्षरात् सम्भवति इह विश्वम् (Mundaka, I.1.7)

[2] यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते (Mundaka, (I.1.7)

[3] असद्वा इदमग्र आसीत्। ततो वै सदजायत (Taittir. II.7)

[4] सोऽकामयत। वहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति। स तपोऽतप्यत। स तपस्तप्त्वा इदं सर्वमसृजत। यदिदं किंच। तत् सृष्ट्वा तदेवानुप्राविशत्। तदनुप्रविश्य सच्च त्यच्चाभवत्.... (Taittir. II.6)

this world.[1] He has entered all the beings and sustains them as the One Self in All, the Atman. And to perceive it, to attain to this Reality behind all appearances and yet beyond the All, to realise one's own essential identity with That is the one supreme object in life that the Upanishads place before man. They not merely place this difficult Ideal before him but show him the means to realise it. They take into account the diversity in the nature, capacity and temperament of men and propound a wide variety of ways of approach to the Highest. These are the Vidyas or Sadhanas or *Upāsanas* that are embedded in these texts. Each Vidya chooses a special aspect of the Supreme and develops its characteristic means of approach to it. Thus the Bhuma Vidya aims at the realisation of the Vast Self, the *Bhuma*, that is to say, it disciplines and guides the individual consciousness so to grow and enlarge itself as to arrive at an ultimate identification with the Consciousness of the Supreme in its infinite extension. There is the Vaishvanara Vidya which teaches the progressive realisation of the oneness of each with the Universal Spirit, the Divine Fire that is aglow in all beings and culminates in the complete identification of the *upāsaka* (worshipper, lit. one who waits on) with the Self of the Universe, the Universal Purusha. Then there is the Prana Vidya—unique for the stress it lays on the potency of life-force—which starts with the life-principle in man and by an intensive purification and subtilisation of it, leads it to its source in the Creative Spirit, in the active Consciousness of the Ishwara and makes of the individual life a dynamic channel, a centre of the Universal Life, a radiation of the dynamis of the Sole Spirit. The Dahara Vidya, as its name indicates, has for its object the realisation of the Atman in the *little space—dahara* (which is the same as *dabhra*) small—, the subtle inner sky, *dahara ākāśa*.. Through it one is enabled to feel, contact, realise the Divine Purusha seated within oneself, in the heart, and to one who has thus gained his Atman, the knowledge of Brahman comes as a matter of course. These Vidyas are named after the particular form they have chosen for approach to the Truth as in the cases cited above, or after the celebrated Teacher who developed and imparted the Vidya e.g. the Shandilya Vidya, or after the worthy disciple who received and practised it with success e.g. Bhargavi Varuni Vidya.

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[1] सर्वम् खल इदं ब्रह्म (Chhandogya).

Some of these Sadhanas aim at the realisation of Brahman without attributes, *Nirguna*, some at Brahman with qualities, *Saguna*. Some show the way to effect the liberation of the individual, *mukti*, from the bonds of ignorance, while others like the Shandilya and the Prana Vidya have more positive methods of affirmation leading to 'solid spiritual attainment'—achievement of positive goal, *sampatti*. But whatever the method and the object, these Sadhanas are all arduous disciplines which none but the heroic in spirit, *dhīraḥ*, can receive and build up.[1] The Path to the Truth, we are clearly warned, is difficult, hard to tread, sharp as the edge of the razor.[2] The toughest wills have been known to reel before the enormity of the task, at the obstructions the human soul has to face in its climb to the peaks. Even the gods, it is said, are jealous and do not wish that man should know.[3] Still, the problem of life has to be faced and the labour undertaken. Man cannot escape it. There are no problems to be solved, no knots to be untied, no release to be effected so long as the contentment of the kingdom of the Vegetable and the Animal reigns. But with the awakening of the mental intelligence in creation, the question of the aim and purpose of life, the significance and goal of the human spirit, all these problems rise up with a challenging peremptoriness and demand the answer. No man can for ever shirk the call. If not today, it will be tomorrow. The Truth of life has to be plumbed into and man, to be worth his manhood, has to find out and realise his true Self. Life is given him as an opportunity to find the Truth and if he strives and *knows* it here, he will have justified his existence. If he does not, great is the perdition.[4] To one who has no aspiration for the higher truth, the Chhandogya says imprecatingly: 'be born and die', *jāyasva mriyasva*.

[1] नायमात्मा वलहीनेन लभ्य: । (Mundaka, III.2.4)

[2] क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया दुर्गं पथस्तत् . . . . (Katha, III.14.)

[3] एषां तन्न प्रियं यदेतन्मनुष्या: विद्यु: (Brih. I.4.1.)

[4] इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति। न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टि: (Kena, II.5)

But where to find the Truth? Brahman is everywhere, in the smallest as well as in the biggest, as the smallest of the small and also as the greatest of the great;[1] he is farther than the farthest, yet nearer than the nearest.[2] He has many stations and he is above all stations, *pāratpara*. He can be approached in any form, in each, in All. The closest centre, the most immediate sanctum, however, declare the Upanishads, is the heart—the *Brahma-pura* as it is expressively called. The heart is the seat of the soul, the divine inhabitant.[3] 'Thou art the sheath of the Brahman', says the Taittiriya.[4] There dwells the Self which is the real sub-stratum behind all Name and Form. The Purusha is here within us,[5] of the size of a thumb,[6] resplendent like light without smoke.[7] This glowing, pure Atman can be seen only by those whose dross of sin is burnt.[8] He is not seen by the physical eye; seated in the heart he is to be seen by the heart.[1] He can be attained only by the force of Tapasya, by means of the truth.[2] To realise one's identity with the Self within is to find one's unity with all other fellow-beings, for the Self of one is also the Self of the other and of all.[3] The is the Message of Unity in the Upanishads which so impressed Schopenhauer that he exclaimed that the fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads is the Doctrine of Unity which 'was at all times the ridicule of fools and the endless meditation of sages.'

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[1] अणोरणीयान् महतो महीयान् (Katha, II.20)

[2] दूरात् दूरे तदिहान्तिके च (Mundaka, III.1.7)

[3] हृदि एष आत्मा (Prashna, III.6)

[4] ब्रह्मणः कोशोऽसि (Taittir, I.4.1)

[5] इहैवान्तःशरीरे स पुरुषः (Prashna, VI.2). मध्ये आत्मनि तिष्ठति (Katha, IV.12)

[6] अङ्गुष्ठमात्र पुरुषोऽन्तरात्मा सदा जनानां हृदये सन्निविष्टः (Katha, VI.17)

[7] ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः (Katha, IV.13)

[8] अन्तःशरीरे ज्योतिर्मयो हि शुभ्रोऽयं पश्यन्ति यतयः क्षीणदोषाः (Mundaka, III.1.5)

There is, we must not fail to note, one indispensable condition to be fulfilled before the momentous journey is undertaken. One must have Faith, faith in the existence of the Divine Being or Reality, in its presence within oneself, in the effectivity of the Sadhana which is embarked upon. Boy Nachiketas, the Upanishad pertinently informs us, was seized by Faith,[4] before he set out on his epic adventure. And in clear terms Nachiketas tells Yama of his competence to receive the higher knowledge from him, for says he, "I am full of faith".[5] One must have the faith that *It is there*; only to him does the

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[1] न चक्षुषा पश्यति कश्चनैनम्। हृदा हृदिस्थं (Svetasvatara IV. 20)

[2] सत्येन लभ्य: तपसा (Mundaka, III.1.5)

[3] अत्र ह्येते सर्वं एकं भवन्ति (Brih. I.4.7)

[4] तम् कुमारम् श्रद्धाविवेश (Katha, 1. 2)

[5] प्रब्रूहि त्वम् श्रद्दधानाय मह्यम् (Katha, I.13)

Being reveal itself.[1] Faith is necessary, not only in the existence of the Atman, but in the word, the *vāk*, of the Acharya, the Teacher, who charges the disciple with the affirmation that '*It is*'. For it is the Teacher who is the channel between the aspiring soul and the ultimate Truth that waits to be revealed. He, the teacher, is in possession of the Truth sought after and unless one has faith in him who has to lead him to it, it is vain to expect the consummating knowledge.[2] And here we come to a very important feature of the Sadhanas of the Upanishadic times or indeed a characteristic feature of spiritual life in India throughout its long history, namely the crucial part the Teacher or Acharya plays in the inner life of the seeker-disciple.

Nowhere in the Upanishads do we find elaborate details of any Vidya. A few directions are given in cryptic sentences or even phrases, usually the starting-points. The results are described; and occasionally, as in the Varuni Vidya, the series of steps to be taken are enunciated. Beyond this there are no discussions of the methods, of the ways and means of negotiating the corners, of the intricacies of untying the several knots with which the being of man is riddled. And the reason is not far to seek. The seeker is initiated into the Sadhana by the teacher, Guru, who holds the secret of the particular Sadhana in himself or has realised it in his own person.

[1] अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धस्य तत्त्वभाव: प्रसीदति (Katha, VI.13)

[2] अस्तीति ब्रवतोऽन्यत्र कथं तदुपलभ्यते (Katha, VI.12)

Unless taught by him, the seeker cannot grasp it; told by a lesser man It cannot be comprehended however much one may ponder over it.[1] The initiation may be accompanied by oral instruction or silent benediction. And in the act of initiation the Acharya, teacher, puts something of his own self, his influence, into the disciple and it is this influence supported by the sincerity of the recipient that initiates the movement of the Sadhana and proceeds to work it out. Thus the actual process of the Sadhana is shaped in its details by the guiding hand of the Guru in conformity with the needs and requirements of the individual nature. There can be no set rules about it. The Acharya, we may add, is usually one who has not only realised the Truth himself, or at least holds in his person the dynamism of the Power that leads to the Truth, but one who has the capacity to reach that realisation to others and mould them in ways best suited to their nature and equipment. He represents, to the disciple, in human form the very object sought for; he is God himself. And one truly knows, i.e. realises, states the Scripture, who has an Acharya.[2] It is in this sense that the sages in the Prashna Upanishad address Teacher Pippalada after worshipping him: "Thou indeed art our Father who takes us safe across the other shore of Ignorance."[1]

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[1] न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त एष सुविज्ञेयो वहुधा चिन्त्यमानः, अनन्यप्रोक्ते गतिरत्र नास्ति (Katha, II.8)

[2] आचार्यवान् पुरुषो वेद

The disciple has, nevertheless, obligations to fulfil. He must cease to belong to the gross life of ignorance and subject himself to a strenuous discipline involving a purification of his outer and inner being, a steady and increasing exposure of his feeling, thinking and other activities to the light of the Knowledge he is gaining.[2] By Tapasya, by Jnana, by continence, and by truth, is the Self to be attained.[3] Tapas, self-control and enlightened activity are the foundation, the Vedas i.e. the lines of knowledge are the various limbs and Truth the Home.[4] The sages of the Upanishads put a very high premium on Truth, Satyam, as the basis of higher life. For, they say, the very nature of Brahman is Truth,[5] and the path to Brahman is hewn through the Truth.[6] He who speaks falsehood, un-truth, dries up from his very roots.[7] And truth in conduct, explains Acharya Shankara, is to be straightforward in (the expressions of) Speech....Mind and body.[1] There is a knowledge that informs, a truth-perception that vibrates in the centre of every awakened being; an uncompromising tuning of all the strings of the lyre of life to this single celestial note is what is demanded of every earnest seeker. All the energies and movements must be directed and turned towards this single object so that, to use the telling illustration of the Mundaka—like the arrow becoming one with the target,[2] the aspirant gets merged in the object of his meditation. He has to be patient, industrious and learn to separate his true self from the body with which he is habituated to identify himself. As one separates the main fibre from the blade of grass, so must one separate the Purusha from one's own body.[3] Of such a one who is given to truth, has faith and is steadfast, the teacher, nay the very gods are fond. "O beloved Nachiketas," says Yama, "truly art thou faithful and steadfast; even such a questioner as thou art may I meet with always."[4]

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[1] त्वं हि नः पिता योऽस्माकमविद्यायाः परं पारं तारयसि (Prashna, VI.8)

[2] ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्त्वः (Mundaka, III.1.8)

[3] सत्येन लभ्यः तपसा ह्येष आत्मा सम्यग् ज्ञानेन ब्रह्मचर्येण नित्यम् (Mundaka, III.1.5)

[4] तपो दमः कर्मेति प्रतिष्ठा, वेदा सर्वाङ्गनि, सत्यमायतनम् (Kena, IV.8)

[5] सत्यम् अनन्तम् ब्रह्म (Taittir. II.1)

[6] सत्येन पन्था विततो देवयानः (Mundaka, III.1.6)

[7] समूलो वा एष परिशुष्यति योऽनृतम् अभिवदिष्यति (Prashna, VI.1)

Still, we have not done. There is a burning aspiration to start with; there is also a deep sustaining faith. There is the Guru who initiates the disciple into the chosen Sadhana and the latter devotes himself to the task, as he must, with exclusive preoccupation. By dint of his effort he can go far, but not very far. Without the aid of some supreme and super-human help from outside the sphere of his personal effort, it is impossible to cross certain barriers, unravel certain knots, *granthis* as they are called, on the way. It is not a mere metaphor when the texts describe the entangling webs and twisted knots around the self. They are real chains forged on our soul by our normal desires and passions, by the pythonic coils of our sempiternal Ignorance which bind the being to the body. The snapping of these bonds and much more the positive realisations of a consummating nature can only be effected by the Grace which may operate through the Guru or directly by itself. It is the Grace of the Ishwara that gives the secret of the Sadhana initially and also effects the culminating release. One cannot force an entry into the Kingdom of the Spirit, however much he may storm with violence the gates of heaven. They are opened to him whom the Grace has chosen; the Atman, state the seers, is attainable by him whom it chooses—to him the Atman reveals its own body.[1] The Sadhanas, after all, prepare the seeker and make him fit for the supreme moment. It is for the Self to choose to unveil itself and thus effect the consummation of the life-long endeavour. The personal exertion, *tapah-prabhāva*, must be crowned and led to fruition by the Grace of the Lord, *devaprasādāt*[1] before the Brahman is known.[2] Even the Gods, it is related, needed the gracious intervention and supreme guidance of Goddess Uma before they could obtain the fuller knowledge of Brahman.[3] Even the seer who is devoted to Truth alone must needs appeal to Pushan, the Sun-God, to unveil the face of Truth hidden by the golden orb[4] or to Agni to 'wear down the devious sin of (his) soul'[5].

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[1] सत्यम् अकौटिल्यम् वाङ्मनःकायानाम्

[2] शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत् (Mundaka, II.2.4)

[3] तम् स्वाच्छरीरात् प्रवृहेत् मुञ्जादिवेषीकाम् धैर्येण (Katha, VI.17)

[4] Tr. by Sri Aurobindo. सत्यधृतिर्वतासि त्वादृङ्नो भूयान्नचिकेतः प्रष्टा (Katha, II.9)

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[1] यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूम् स्वाम् ।
(Mundaka, III. 2. 3; Katha, II. 23).

Such a one to whom the Self reveals itself, one who has realised his indentity with the Divine Self or Purusha that is the Self of all selves, ceases to be a separate self, but remains an individual constituted and living apparently separate from others. He becomes an illumined centre of the Universal Spirit, becomes the Universal man from whom pour out ceaselessly joy and energy, happiness and strength to his fellow-beings. Him they desire, him they yearn for.[6] And he too enters into their lives, makes of their existence a part of his own.[7] He aims not to reject the world which is, indeed, God's creation and abode, and therefore not a baseless illusion but embraces it as His manifestation,[1] the very body of Brahman. It is in line with this Knowledge that Sri Aurobindo calls out:

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[1] Svetasvatara (VI. 21)

[2] जुष्टः ततः तेनामृतत्वमेति । (Svet. I.6)

[3] Kena Upanishad III. 12

[4] हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखं ।
तत् त्वं पूषान्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ।। (Isha, 15)

[5] Tr. Sri Aurobindo. युयोध्यमज्जुहुराणमेनः । (Isha, 18).

[6] य एतदेवं वेदाभि हैनं सर्वाणि भूतानि संवाञ्छन्ति । (Kena, IV.6)

[7] ते सर्वगं सर्वतः प्राप्य धीराः युक्तात्मानः सर्वमेवाविशन्ति ।
(Mundaka, III.2.5.)

> "Reject not the body of God, O God-lover, but keep it for thy joy; for His body too is delightful, even as His spirit."

The worlds are certainly created through the active agency of the Power of the Supreme, the *Māyā* but to the sages of the Upanishad as to the Seers of the Rig Veda, Maya is not mere power of illusion as it came to be with latter builders of philosophy, but an inherent Power, the Executrix, the Power with capacity to delimit the limitless, to measure out the immeasurable. It is by this Power that the Lord became the Many. Thus hymns the Seer Bharadwaja:

> "To every form he has remained the counter-form: that is his Form for us to face and see. Indra by his Maya powers (creative conscious powers) moves on endowed with many forms; for yoked are his thousand steeds."[2]

The Brihadaranyaka repeats this Rik verbatim (II.5.19). The Svetasvatara unequivocally calls Maya the executive

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[1] सैषा ब्रह्मणोऽतिसृष्टिः । (Brih. I.4.6)

[2] Rig Veda, VI. 47. 18.

Nature and Him as her Lord.[1] The creation is not merely created and founded by this Consciousness as Power of the Lord but is guided by this Power of Consciousness.[2]

The perfected soul, as we see in the Upanishads, not merely realises his unity with the rest of existence. He is not merely identified with the Divine Person within himself. He is one with the Gods—"That Purusha I am, who dwells in Thee, O Sun" declares the sage in the Isha (16). Such a one, describes the Chhandogya, rejoicing in the freedom of the Self, sporting with the Self, enjoying with the Self, and delighting in the Self, lives in complete autonomy, moves in all the worlds where he listeth.[3]

These in outline are the central features of the Teachings of the sacred texts. If we have not dwelt upon some of the other aspects it is because our studies of the Upanishads were prompted mainly with a view to find out how far and in what manner they constitute the crown, the sum of the Veda, that hoary Testament of the Rishis of old. The Veda is to us essentially spiritual in its origin, character and its Message. We concerned ourselves with the question whether the Upanishads really continue the Vedic tradition or are radical departures from it. We have seen that the sages of the Upanishad not only uphold the ancient tradition, return to the authority of the Vedic seers time and again for confirmation and approval of their realisations, but go on to enlarge and develop what is contained in the Vedas in seed form. We would have liked to elaborate upon this last feature at more length but that is quite a subject by itself and we have had to content ourselves with but a few brief hints in the direction. We have also seen how invaluable these texts are as Guides or Manuals of Sadhana to those who are in earnest about spiritual life, what a catholic air they breathe and comprehensive Ideal they hold up before man. The rest is not germane to our purpose. As in every ancient text of the kind, of all civilisations, there may be much else besides, touching upon or arising from popular, social beliefs and customs of the prevailing society. But the central truths which form the main fabric of the Upanishads are woven round the Odyssey of the human Soul which in truth is a progressive self-revelation of the Supreme Creator amid the Symphony of the rhythms of the Universal spirit.

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[1] मायाम् तु प्रकृतिं विद्यात् मायिनं तु महेश्वरम् । (Svet. IV.10)

[2] सर्वम् तत् प्रज्ञानेत्रम्, प्रज्ञाने प्रतिष्ठितम्, प्रज्ञानेत्रो लोकः ।
(Aitareya, II.3)

[3] आत्मरतिः आत्मक्रीडः आत्ममिथुनः आत्मानन्दः स
स्वराड् भवति तस्य सर्वेषु लोकेषु कामचारो भवति । (7.25.2)